

WORLD'S LEADING SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

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MAY, 1955

AMAZING STORIES

VOL. 29 NO. 3



THE CHAINED MAN
By P. F. Costello

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AMAZING STORIES, Vol. 29, No. 3, May 1955, is published bi-monthly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00.

AMAZING

STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

MAY 1955
VOLUME 29 NUMBER 3

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

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HOWARD BROWNE

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the observatory

by The Editor



● With this column back in the pages of *Amazing Stories*, the cycle is now complete. Editorial, fanzine reviews, book reviews and a long, long department for letters from the readers. Stories now have a strong accent on action, newly discovered galaxies are conquered, whole solar systems are blown to bits, and love rears its beautiful head from one end of the universe to the other. Just like in the golden days of the old pulps; better written and with better illustrations, of course, and appearing in a neater package than the old-style ragged-edge magazines of the forties.

Bill McGivern dropped by for lunch one day last week, just before he and his family took off for a year in Europe. You remember Bill; he and his good friend David Wright O'Brien wrote literally hundreds of top science-fiction and fantasy yarns for the Ziff-Davis magazines before the war. Dave died in action in December, 1944—but Bill came back to continue his career. His science-fiction and fantasy stories became few and far between as his interest turned more and more to the detective and suspense markets. You've seen the results in such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's* and *Cosmopolitan*; in such motion pictures—based on his novels—as "The Big Heat", "Rogue Cop", "Shield for Murder", and an upcoming picture with Alan Ladd.

Anyway, we got to talking about the good old days, when writing greats such as Don Wilcox (now living in Kansas and with a novel about to appear under the Little, Brown imprint); Robert Moore Williams, who is still turning out some of the best work in the field; Berkeley Livingston, at present almost inactive as a writer; Chester Geier, no longer writing;

LeRoy Yerxa, who died of a heart attack seven or eight years ago; and a host of others. In those days Ray Palmer filled the editor's chair—and while Ray was, and is, a small guy physically, nobody ever filled the chair as well. A writer would drop in on Ray and say, "I'm through, done, washed up! Can't think of a plot newer than 'Little Red Riding Hood.'" Ray would lean back and put his feet up and say something like: "Little Red Riding Hood, eh? Okay, let's say there's a good-looking gal named Gloria Hood. She's got red hair, so her nickname is 'Red.' The Federation of Planets is at war with another solar system on the other side of the galaxy, you see, and the Feds have to get a short-wave set to their spies in the enemy camp. So Red, being an innocent-looking, frail-type gal, is hired to smuggle the set in, disguising it as a basket of goodies. . . ." Half an hour later the writer was back at his typewriter, grinding out copy, a beatific smile wreathing his space-weathered features.

It's not like that around these editorial offices any more. For one thing, the days when *Amazing Stories* ran 276 pages an issue are gone—probably forever. Too, another crop of writers came into the scene. Many of them scorned the bang-bang type of science-fiction. They were exponents of the social significance theme, of the underplayed conflict, of the development of character through adversity. Fandom, they said—with some justification—was growing up, and what was interesting science-fiction ten years ago no longer could hold a reader's attention. The editors listened and believed—and the old-time action story faded from the scene. The boys who wrote such material tried switching to the new concepts—or quit writing altogether. No more dropping around to the editor for a fast plot; the new writers had their own ideas of what constituted science-fiction and would resent any editorial meddling.

Well, we've changed all that. We've had to. The faithful of fandom tried their best to take to the new school of future fiction, but slowly they began to turn away from it. Sales figures told what was taking place. It began to dawn on this editor that he had been wrong to take from *Amazing Stories* the very things that made it the leader in the field. It meant that changes were in order—and you'll find those changes in this, and future issues.—HB

The CHAINED MAN

By P. F. COSTELLO

*A pretty girl, a handsome man,
a space ship. Bundle them all
together—and call the police!*

THE man snubbed out his cigarette and bent down to kiss the beautiful, dark, cat-like woman.

"It's been wonderful, sweetheart," he said huskily. "No man ever had such a bride. No husband was ever so lucky."

The woman smiled lazily, moved like a young panther toward the thick quartz port. "Where are we, darling?" she asked.

"Who cares? So far as I'm concerned, I'm out in space on a honeymoon with my wife. The details of speed, orbit, and location, I'm happy to leave to your Nigel."

The woman continued to





The girl said lazily, "Don't kill him, Nigel. Not yet."

smile. "Nigel—he is a prize, isn't he? I think I see a small planet down there. Let's call him and ask him where we are."

"Certainly, my darling."

A few moments later, Nigel entered the cabin, bowed with a touch of deference, and waited quietly. The man looked him over with marked approval. A fine Terran specimen: blond, well-muscled, handsome; but far more important, an ideal servant and an amazingly competent pilot. Strange that Nigel had never aspired to better things.

The woman said, "Nigel—be a dear and tell us exactly where we are. That planet out there for instance—is it inhabited?"

"It does not appear to be, madam."

The eyes of the woman and the pilot met for an instant. The woman said, "Then what are we waiting for?"

Nigel smiled, doubled one fist and rubbed it in the palm of the other. "I know what I've been waiting for—a chance to hit this supercilious slob."

The husband's eyes widened. "What in—"

Nigel took one quick step and hit him in the stomach. The husband gagged and bent forward. Nigel, timing his

movement to a nicety, kicked him squarely in the mouth. The husband emitted a garbled scream. Nigel straightened and smashed a fist into his bloody face. The husband back-pedalled and fell cringing against the wall. He turned desperate eyes toward his wife.

The woman lay back on the lounge, a semi-transparent robe scarcely hiding the details of her great physical beauty. She still smiled lazily, but now there was a look of relish in her eyes and she seemed more than ever like a sleek, gorgeous cat.

Nigel picked the fallen man up and hit him again. As the husband fell to the floor, Nigel wiped blood from his knuckles and kicked out viciously. Blood flowed from the husband's mouth.

The woman said, "Control yourself, darling." She spoke to Nigel as though admonishing a small child for a minor infraction. "You don't want to kill him and miss the best part, do you?"

"No. Of course not. I'll set the ship down."

While the wife stretched languidly and the husband, now unable to speak, questioned and pleaded with his eyes, Nigel brought the ship

down on the surface of the wild, deserted planet and returned to the honeymoon cabin.

"You have the chains ready?" the woman asked.

"I opened the lock and tossed them out."

She shrugged, "Well, there he is. Take him."

"Aren't you coming?"

"I'll watch from the port. The harsh atmosphere of these outer spheres irritates my throat."

"Very well." Nigel picked up the husband and carried him like a limp doll to the port. The woman moved to the window and looked out, smiling, as Nigel chained the husband to a rock. When the job was completed, he knelt down and carefully examined the chains; the prisoner's bound hands and feet moved feebly.

Nigel straightened and looked down at the man, enjoying the agony of fear in the luckless one's eyes; grinning in appreciation as the husband strove to speak, to beg. Then Nigel turned and reboarded the ship.

The lock was closed and the two remaining occupants of the ship stood for a while at the port looking out at Nigel's handiwork.

The woman slid a beautiful arm over Nigel's great shoul-

ders and said, "He looks so full of agony, doesn't he?"

"Observe the terror in his eyes."

"And you do enjoy it so."

Nigel was in the midst of a deep emotional pleasure. "Nothing could be sweeter. The buildup is so perfect. Watching him make love to you as we ride the orbit; knowing what goes on in here through the hours."

"You're a darling," the woman purred.

"How much did we get?"

"This was a fat one. Half a million units."

"Then we can quit business for a while—take a little time off."

She slid into his arms. "We can—but do you want to?"

He gripped her shoulders. "No! No—of course not! Business is more fun."

A few minutes later, she drew her face away from his to ask, "And do you know why it's so wonderful?"

"Is there a specific reason?"

"Of course. It's because, during my courtship and marriage and honeymoon with these fools, you are forced to practice restraint until the mind and body—your every emotion—begins screaming; shrieking for vengeance—demanding me."

"Stop talking and kiss me."

Her chuckle was the purring of a huge cat.

He was a lean, whiskered space rover and he came down to the planet in a battered old one-jet job that he talked to as a companion because, in truth, she was the only companion he had.

"Now, that's a likely looking lump of rock, honey. Real promising. It just might be the one we've hunted all these years." He arced down, leaned the ship back on her tail, and brought her in.

"Only takes one strike, honey. Just one to give us a skyhouse in Nevada and a country place in the Martian Gardens." He opened the air lock and tested the atmosphere through an old piece of hose. He pondered like a housewife tasting the batter for a cake. "Good air, honey. Coarse, but good." He grinned suddenly. "You know? I got a hunch we've made the big find of the Century!"

He opened the inner lock and went out with his counter hanging from one shoulder and his spectroscope from the other. "Be right back, honey. You wait. I'll bring you the news."

But he did not go far. Breasting the first rise, he stopped suddenly and stared

down at the remains of a tragedy that lay before him. He looked for a while, then began slowly circling the spot, careful not to move too close. He shook his head sadly. "Too, bad. Terrible thing. Now who do you suppose'd be mean enough to do a thing like that?"

He went back into the ship, put down his tools and pulled the cover off his communication unit. He frowned and tugged at one ear. "Haven't used this thing in years, honey. Wonder if it still works?" He flipped a switch and heard the hum as the battery fed in the power. "Sure hope it works. Wouldn't want to get in bad with the FSSA. They can make it pretty hard for a man if they take the notion." He flipped in the transmitter switch. "Well, here goes," he muttered, and began sending.

Fitzhugh Goodbody, Senior Investigator of the Federated System Security Arm, was an ugly little gnome with a head big enough—according to Bidford Payne, his assistant—to carry an extra motor for a space launch. Biddy of course made no such observation to Fitz's face, which was more than could be said of Fitz, who often addressed his new as-

sistant as the "million-dollar half-wit."

But the two made a good team, possibly because each had something the other could admire—or envy. Biddy admired and yearned for Fitz's brains and ability, while the latter wondered why such a magnificent body and physical good looks was wasted on a character with a one-cylinder mind.

Fitzhugh, seated now at his desk in the Frisco office, looked up suddenly from the book he was reading and said, "Do you know there's a planet in this galaxy inhabited entirely by monks?"

Biddy took off the ear-phones through which he'd been checking current report tapes in the hope of finding a good gory crime, and said, "Is that a fact?"

"Exactly—a fact—but you won't remember it five minutes."

"Why should I?"

"Because no one should insult a fact by forgetting it. Facts should be respected by being given room in one's memory. That's the least one can do for a good, solid fact."

"But I'm not interested in monks."

"This order of penitents traveled, in 2085, to a small isolated planet in Virgo and

established themselves as a self-sufficient unit—tilling the soil—worshipping God—"

"No women?"

"Don't be profane! Of course no women."

"How can they be self-sufficient then? If they were established in 2085, they'd all be dead now, without women to—"

"They draw fresh volunteers from our solar planets."

"Sounds very dull."

Fitz sighed. "If you didn't have four million units and a rich father, you might be a detective some day."

"Why should my units and my father stop me?"

"They make you a diletante."

"A which?"

"An amateur—a tourist out for the ride. You don't have to succeed at your profession, therefore you don't work very hard."

Biddy put down the ear-phones. "Now look here—"

The door opened. A clerk entered and laid a sheet of paper on Fitz's desk. "An outer communication. Just came in, sir. Self-explanatory."

"Thank you." Fitz took the sheet and studied it. The report bore his own assignment number and was a verbatim statement of what had gone

both ways through the ether. Fitz skipped the location data and went straight to the message.

"Sam Bailey—prospector—ship Doris—calling FSSA."

"You have been channeled to Frisco office—proceed."

"Set down on this planet to do a little prospecting—rock formations looked good—thought—"

"Please do not digress."

"All right—found a skeleton on said planet."

"Why should we be interested?"

"Same has hands and feet bound—same is chained to a rock—same must have died while chained to rock—location inside FSSA juris—jur—the thing looks like your baby."

"Please repeat location for check."

Fitz laid down the sheet, looked into space for a while, then tossed the report to Biddy. "Get a ship voucher. Fast job. We should make it in three days."

Biddy read the report while Fitz penciled some notations. When he finished, Biddy was scowling. "You mean we're going clear to hell and gone out there just to look at a skeleton chained to a rock? Why not tell the old space-coot to bring it in with him?"

"A fine suggestion. Why don't you just run up to the Chief's office and tell him? That way, you'll get credit."

"Well, it seems kind of stupid to—"

"My boy, we are a law-enforcement agency. We enforce the law from here to certain boundaries of the galaxy. Every indication of law-breaking within those boundaries requires our personal attention. If a corpse was reported out in the hall, would you ask them to drag it in here in order to save you a walk?"

"But way out in—"

"The Federation provides transportation. One of your duties is to act as my pilot. Move!"

Biddy moved.

Three and a half Terran days later, the two men stood on a small, bleak planet looking down at a chained skeleton inside a moulding space-suit. Fitz shook his head sadly. "It's amazing how cruel they can be. A terrible death."

"Why in hell would anybody want to do a thing like this?"

"I wouldn't know—but I mean to find out."

"How?"

Fitz looked thoughtfully at his assistant. "Detection is a slow, dogged business; mainly a process of elimination."

"You mean you eliminate all the people who couldn't have done it?"

"Not exactly. That would involve some nineteen billion persons. It would take too long."

Biddy looked around the bleak scene. "I don't want to seem stupid, but being new at this game, I'm interested. And I can't see how you could even begin to find the criminals who did this. They could be light years away by this time."

"A man who had come up through the ranks would not take such a defeatist attitude."

"There you go again. Blaming me and my family for having a few units."

"No, blaming your father for pulling strings. You should have started in a patrol ship out in the asteroids along with the other rookies."

Biddy's handsome face clouded. "I could put in for a transfer," he said stiffly.

"No. We'll play the cards as they fall. You're a likable lad. Pleasant company. That's something. Now, how about getting the pictures?"

While Biddy brought the photographic equipment from the ship, Fitz puttered about with no apparent objective in view. He silently commended

Biddy for a good covering job and when his assistant had completed it, said, "Now, I'd like a sample of the atmosphere and the soil. Fill one of the compressed air tanks you'll find in the ship. You'll also find a box for earth and rock."

When Biddy had completed the appointed chores, Fitz handed him an envelope. "Put this in with the soil sample."

"What's in it?"

"A sample I picked up myself."

"What about the skeleton?"

"That's your next job. Put the bones and the chains in another box and we'll get back to civilization."

On the afternoon of the fourth day following, Fitz looked up from his desk in the Frisco office as Biddy entered. "I believe our criminals will be found in Baltic City," he said.

Biddy put his earphones down. "That's on Mars."

"It was the last I heard."

There was a frown on Biddy's handsome face as he got up and walked to Fitz's desk. "What do you do? Go into a trance? You came straight back from the scene of the crime and sat down at that desk. You've been sitting there ever since. You didn't

even use the phone. Now you pop your head up and say the criminals are in Baltic City. It all smacks of black magic."

Fitz sighed inwardly, a little sad at Biddy's apparent lack of respect. He charged it off to the way the wealthy class brought up their children and decided protests would do no good. He said, "On the contrary, I have been quite busy. I've been studying all the reports on the case."

"I long to be enlightened."

"Well, analysis of the bones—mainly the calcium content—gives us quite a little to go on. First, the time of the murder. The condition of the skeleton checked against the atmosphere at the scene of the crime and the soil upon which it was lying, gives us the knowledge that such a state of disintegration would have been reached in four and one-half Terran months. We can safely say the man was chained down on that planet during the second week in June."

"How do you know it was a man?"

"That is most elementary. Measurements of the skeleton prove it beyond all peradventure doubt."

"Simple, when you explain it."

"Isn't it? In fact, we have

a pretty accurate reconstructed picture of the victim."

Fitz handed Biddy a sheet of paper. The assistant studied the artist's handiwork: a full-length drawing of a rather stout, middle-aged man, partially bald, with blue eyes, sagging jowls, and slightly protruding teeth. "A Terran," Biddy said.

"Exactly."

"But there are quite a few Terran males in the galaxy."

"Further analysis helps us pin-point this one somewhat. As you may or may not know, calcium varies in molecular structure according to its source; so much so that spectroscopic-chemico breakdown tells us this man spent a great deal of time in southwestern United States."

"That covers a lot of territory."

"It shows also, that he lived on Mars."

"That doesn't narrow the search. It widens it."

"To the contrary. Let's bring some logic to bear on the problem. Mars is quite some distance from Terra. The trip back and forth is expensive. Therefore, we can assume the man was wealthy."

"That still leaves us a long way from Baltic City."

"It puts us closer. It also points him directly toward a

rendezvous with his two murderers. Knowing he was wealthy, we take a shot in the dark and contact Star Lanes, the luxury space line out of Frisco, the one a wealthy man would probably patronize when going to Mars. Its port, there, is Baltic City."

"Wait a minute. How do you know that two—"

"We find from Star Lanes records that five men who fit our reconstructed picture went to Baltic City during the two-month period prior to our victim's death. Three of them returned. That leaves two."

Biddy waved a protesting hand. "It seems to me you're assuming a hell of a lot. You haven't even begun to prove the murderers ever were in Baltic City. And you said two—"

"Oh, yes. Now let's look at the corroborating evidence. I said there were two killers. While you were getting supplies from the ship at the scene of the crime, I snooped around and found where a ship had set down nearby. Now, as any school boy knows, a space ship sets down on four fins. I measured the distances between the four points of contact with the soil. The fin-spread of space ships varies with their size. There-

fore, it was a very simple thing to prove the ship that landed was a three-jet, four-passenger job. As a matter of fact, it was a Q-47 Space Wasp, sold by the Dickinson Interplanetary Craft Corporation. The retail price is in the neighborhood of twenty thousand units."

Biddy's look was more respectful. "Fine. How many of these ships have been sold?"

"About eleven hundred of that particular model."

"That leaves some checking to do."

"We can narrow it down. The soil in the envelope I gave you was from the small pits left by the tips of the four fins. Close analysis revealed microscopic traces of Martian soil. Luckily, there were enough of these particles to get a local comparison. There is no doubt that the soil came from the blasting pits in Baltic City."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Biddy said.

"I won't bore you with any more details, but of the two men unaccounted for from the Star Lane records, one was a millionaire bachelor named Patterson. He had only distant relatives, none of whom had reason to miss him. Until proven wrong, I'm spotting him as our victim."

"Why?"

"Experience, mainly. For the same reason I think our criminals are a male and a female."

Biddy pondered. "Rich bachelor. Middle-aged. Hmm. That I can follow."

"I'm happy to hear you say that."

"And you came all this way by just sitting at your desk and using your head!"

"Oh, no. But studying the results of a great deal of work by a vast, alert, swiftly-operating organization." Fitz raised his huge, ugly head and looked at his assistant. "An organization I hope you'll be very proud of some not too distant day."

"I'm proud of it now. Where do we go from here?"

"Baltic City, of course."

Ninety hours later, the superintendent of the mooring yard at the Baltic City blast pits walked up to a short, ugly little man who seemed to be standing around for no apparent reason. "Anything I can do for you?"

The man tipped his hat and gave the superintendent a leer that was probably meant for a smile. "I was just looking at that ship, the *Baltic Queen*. Nice lines."

"It's a fairish ship."

"Any chance of its being for sale?"

"Are you in the market?"

"That would depend on the price."

The thought of a possible commission raised the ship in the superintendent's estimate. "Those Q-47s are nice, flexible cruisers. They don't come cheap."

"Price is a comparative matter. Could you put me in touch with the owners?"

"I could call and check with them," the superintendent said cautiously. "If the ship's not for sale, they may not want to be bothered."

"That's true. Shall we go to your office?"

In the superintendent's office, Fitz stood looking out the window listening to the clicks of the dial spring as the superintendent spun the number. He heard the man explain and ask his question. The answer came quickly. The man turned from the phone. "Not for sale," he said. "But if you will leave your name and number so I can get in touch with you—"

"I'll drop around again," Fitz said. "Thank you very much."

A check on the number led Fitz to 7 Plaza Rivoli, up on Gold Knob Hill, from which

the wealthy of Baltic City looked down upon the remaining four-fifths.

A small white card under a bell said, *Mr. and Mrs. Jan Spurdick*. Fitz checked his tie and shirt front and punched the bell. While waiting, he took a handful of calling cards from his pocket and thoughtfully selected one.

A moment later, a soft bell rang and a section of the wall opened. Fitz stepped inside. The wall closed and the elevator shot silently roofward, stopping just as Fitz was sure it had gone beyond the last ceiling and up into space.

He stepped out into a lushly carpeted hallway as the elevator door snapped playfully at his coat-tails and went back downstairs. He went along the hall and found another button and pressed it. A man opened the door.

At least he was a creature who passed for a man. Fitz spotted the camouflage instantly, and knew that most biologists and anthropologists would have made strenuous argument on the point. To Fitz's trained eye, here was a Ganymedian biped that had gone to an excellent plastic surgeon.

Fitz let his memory slip back into a certain locked file of the Security Arm back in

Frisco. In this file, each of the seventy-odd varieties of intelligent animal life residing in the galaxy were exhaustively indexed and analyzed for the benefit of the police personnel.

Of all these forms, the Ganymedian biped was overshadowed in cruelty, homicidal instinct, and high intelligence, only by the Georgian feline entities which came from the Georgian asteroids on the far side of the galaxy. The Ganymedian biped could justly be classed as an animal with the mind of a man. Also, with its tusks removed and replaced by unobtrusive teeth, with the bright blue skin of its neck bleached and restrained a sun-tan shade, it could pass as a Terran so long as it kept its red-pupiled eyes covered by contact lenses.

The surgeon who'd worked on this one, had done an excellent job. Only small, almost invisible details remained for the trained eye to spot. Other eyes saw a tall, handsome, blonde Terran with a physique any man would have envied.

The Ganymedian wore a tight fitting pajama set of red Venusian wolfskin that set off his muscles to perfection. He

scowled and asked, "What do you want?"

Fitz looked past him, into the luxurious one-room apartment. Quick shock sent a chill down his spine. "Is the lady of the house home?"

"You can see her sitting there, can't you?"

Switching his approach instantly, Fitz ignored the calling card he had previously selected, and pawed into his breast pocket for another one. He smiled and said, "I represent the Universal Cosmetic Company. We plan to establish offices here in Baltic City, and—"

"We don't want any. Now turn your fat gut around and—"

"Let him in, Jan."

"What in the hell do we—?"

"Let him in."

The Ganymedian sullenly pulled the door open and stepped aside. "Come on in. But make it fast."

Fitz walked past him to stand before the beautiful creature that lay on an expensive green lounge beside the picture window that framed a breath-taking view of Baltic City. She wore a transparent robe that outlined long, smooth legs and a body to which no sculptor could have done justice. Fitz was aware

of the heady perfume, sharp and musky, that hung over her like an aura. And, completely aware of what she was, he still felt her tremendous sex-magnetism pulling at him like gravity itself.

Swiftly, he visualized her as she had been before some evil chance had allowed her to escape from the Georgian asteroids. Then she'd been completely covered with soft gray fur. The irises of her eyes had been long black slits. Her teeth had been jet-black and had no doubt been stained more than once with the blood of a Georgian male. The weakest of the species, the males were invariably killed by the females of those infamous asteroids.

But the gray fur had been carefully shaved from every inch of the beautiful body and the skin tanned to a gorgeous golden brown. The teeth had been capped with snowy porcelain and the slit irises were hidden by huge, limpid, dark eyes painted on contact lenses.

How, Fitz wondered, had this murderous pair ever gotten together? How many brutal crimes had they committed? How many lives had they snuffed out? The Georgian female's sex lure, an almost tangible force, could render

helpless any unsuspecting male in the galaxy.

She was smiling lazily. "You are something new—a bashful salesman. Come! Speak up. Every woman is interested in cosmetics."

Fitz had counted on that. He was marveling at the beautiful black wig she wore and was wondering what it had cost. He said, "I'm not a salesman exactly. More of a goodwill man. Publicity. I'm calling on the ladies of Baltic City so that when we open our salon in this section they'll know what we have to offer and possibly think kindly of us."

Fitz felt a wave of heat sweep over him and he knew she was deliberately exerting her sex-lure—probably for amusement. Fitz braced himself against the hot, exciting sensation. He said, "I won't take up much of your time, now. But later, I'll take the liberty of extending you an invitation to a cocktail party we plan prior to our opening."

"I'd be delighted." She watched Fitz's eyes as they went—of their own volition—to her beautiful body; watched with amusement as he resolutely pulled them away.

Fitz got to his feet. No need to spend additional time here. He had his quarry spotted—knew from experience the

method of operation these two used. He fumbled with his hat and said, "I'll be going now. Thank you for your time."

The scowling Ganymedian opened the door. Fitz walked past him, goose pimples rising on his skin as he came near the handsome animal. He was glad to hear the door close behind him.

Biddy was exhibiting the impatience that comes of youth and inexperience. He said, "It doesn't make sense to me. Any of it."

"I'll be glad to clear it up for you," Fitz said wearily.

"In the first place—why all the pussyfooting? You're a policeman with a policeman's authority. So why put on the act with the blast pit superintendent. Why didn't you just walk in and demand the information you wanted?"

"Because I didn't have the least idea whether he was an honest man or a criminal. He could have passed the word on to Gold Knob Hill and I'd have found the apartment vacated."

Biddy considered that. "All right, but when you finally located them, why did you go on with the act? You know they're the pair you want. Why not grab them?"

"Knowledge and proof are two different things. A good

many hundred years ago, some primitive men in ancient United States formulated a document called the Constitution. This document protected the rights of men and became the basis of modern Terran and Universal law. This Constitution says, among other things, that no man is required to testify against himself; that a man is innocent until proven guilty."

Biddy waved an impatient hand. "I know all that, but a Georgian feline—a Ganymedian—"

"Are basically animals, but the Universal Charter doesn't class them as such. If it did, we'd have gone in and annihilated them centuries ago, just as we did the Venusian apes and the Plutonian quadrupeds."

"I think the Charter founders made a mistake."

"Then I suggest you get up a petition asking them to correct it. But in the meantime, we have a *man* and a *woman* to apprehend and convict legally. And we have very little in the way of proof. Almost nothing that would stand up in court."

"But you *know*—"

"What we found out is mere routine, not proof. A court would call it circumstantial evidence. We can put the

killers and the victim on the same planet and that's all. We can't prove they killed the victim, and if I'm any judge of those two, we won't even be able to establish contact with the victim. They're far too smart to leave any real evidence behind them."

Biddy frowned. "Then what do we do? Call the whole thing off and go home?"

Fitz was regarding his assistant with veiled speculation. "Not necessarily. I have an idea that might convict them. That is, if you wouldn't object to acting as a decoy."

"Of course I wouldn't."

"This could be dangerous—if anything went wrong."

"Look—I may not be as smart as you are—but I'm no coward."

Fitz smiled and felt an inward warmth. He knew there had been a reason he'd taken to Biddy; something above and beyond the young man's personality. He said, "Very well, we'll go ahead with it. But remember this—under no circumstances must that pair learn you are a detective. It would be fatal."

Fitz and Biddy sat in a car across the street from the Royal Baltic Hotel. "I think she makes her contacts in the Royal Palm Room. That's

where I'd spend most of my time if I were you."

"I'd say that there's one big risk."

"What's that?"

"Maybe she's already working on a potential sucker."

"That's possible. If so, try and spot him."

"Well, wish me luck."

"You'll need it. "By the way—this should be our last personal contact. Report to me by phone when you get the chance. Or drop me a note."

"All right. I'll keep in touch. And don't put any men on me. These people, as you say yourself, are smart."

"One last word—don't drink too much."

Biddy grinned. "I can hold my liquor."

Four days later, Biddy sat at the bar in the Royal Palm Room. It was a gorgeous place, an exact replica of a Terran tropic isle. A hidden orchestra drenched the place with romantic guitar music that was beginning to hit Biddy's ears like thick syrup.

He had done careful preliminary work, had spread tips lavishly, and was known as a young Terran playboy with far more money than brains.

He had seen the woman twice; once when Fitz pointed

her out to him from across the street as she left her apartment, once in the Royal Palm Room when she had entered and sat at a table alone. Biddy immediately bought drinks for the house and insisted on serving her personally and with a flourish.

The experience shook him. He had never seen such a beautiful woman and, in Biddy's case, that covered a lot of ground. He felt her tremendous magnetism and could understand why unsuspecting males fell into her trap.

But she did not return to the Royal Palm Room again, and he was beginning to doubt the success of the project. The place was beginning to bore him and he sat, now, deciding whether to contact Fitz and report failure. His thoughts were interrupted by a sound. He turned.

Directly behind his stool lay an expensive bag, the contents strewn about the floor. He and the bag's owner stooped down in unison. Their heads almost collided. Biddy said, "Oh, I'm sorry."

She smiled. "Quite all right. Clumsy of me."

It was the woman.

Biddy handed her the bag. "You must let me buy you a drink. Small recompense for being a lout."

She smiled. "How can I refuse when I was to blame?"

"Shall we go to a table?"

"I'd be delighted."

"I see one in the corner over there. Almost hidden by their best palms. We can get acquainted."

"Wonderful," she purred.

Biddy followed her across the room. Contact!

Fitz waited three days before returning to the Baltic City blast pits. He discovered, not at all to his surprise, that this was the superintendent's day off. Fitz now wore the regulation uniform of an inspector from the Space Craft Inspection and Licensing Bureau. He carried a regulation bag containing a set of regulation tools. He carried proper identification. He said, "Three expirations. Can you point these ships out to me?"

The assistant was respectful. He obliged. And, not by chance, one of the ships was the *Baltic Queen*.

Fitz spent quite a little time in the *Queen*. He found it to be a regulation four-man job with extra power and accommodations. It was in excellent condition. Even a genuine inspector could have found no fault with it.

When he had finished with the *Queen*, Fitz went swiftly

over the other two ships and quietly left the blast pits.

Biddy lay back on a lounge in a luxurious penthouse apartment on Gold Knob Hill and reached for a cigarette. When he put it between his lips, a light was waiting. He blew out a cloud of smoke and said, "Thank you, Nigel."

The ravishing, black-haired woman, reclining on a second lounge, said, "You may leave, Nigel. We'll have no further need of you."

The blond man bowed with deference. "Thank you, Madam. Do you wish me to return later?"

"I'll call if we want you."

"Very good, Madam." Nigel bowed again, then turned and bowed, with the same deference, to Biddy.

Nigel left and Biddy said, "Sylvia, darling—I'm almost jealous of that man."

Her soft laugh was like the sound of a silver bell. "Nigel? Don't be childish, angel. I've never been guilty of encouraging servants."

"All the same, I think we'll get rid of him after we're married."

She registered mild surprise. "Get rid of Nigel? Why he's a rare jewel, angel. And he admires you more than a great deal."

"But we'll have no need of him."

"Not need a servant?"

"I'm going to be your servant. I can do everything for you that Nigel can—and more."

She laughed again. "We'll see—after the honeymoon. We have to have a pilot."

"I'm a pilot."

Her eyes glowed. "But angel, you'll be far too busy to bother about piloting a ship."

Biddy lay back dreamily. "I guess you're right."

"Why don't you come over here and kiss me?"

"A wonderful idea."

Fitz paced the room restlessly. Two weeks had passed. On the desk, lay two short notes from Biddy. These, together with a hurried phone call reporting the contact, had been the only communications. The last note was four days old.

Fitz continued to pace, a frown twisting his ugly face into a look of added ugliness. His misgivings had been mounting steadily. He had realized the dangers of this project from the first, but he'd had a long time to ponder them in solitude and they broadened in his mind. He wondered if he had had the

right to expose Biddy to such perils.

He tried to reassure himself by remembering that Biddy was a detective; that he had entered the profession with his eyes open. He was of age and had been adjudged as competent. Therefore, he had to assume the risks involved.

Also, Fitz told himself, the project had been necessary. Direct evidence—a first-hand witness—was vital if those two were to be convicted. Fitz cursed the law that made evidence procured from truth-serum inadmissible without corroboration. It was a silly law and some day it would be changed. At present, the only way to convict the pair was the way Fitz had devised; the project that put Biddy's head on the block. Fitz had taken all possible precautions, of course, but he knew from experience that precautions could go wrong. Those two had brains. What if they discovered how he had tampered with their ship?

Fitz paced on, going over each detail again, telling himself the manipulation was fool-proof. He finished that line of thought by hoping that it was, and went on looking for other holes in the plan. He was sure he had foreseen every possible hole in the

plan—caulked each hole up tight. But had he missed one?

He certainly had. It was revealed to him when the door opened and a messenger entered to hand him an envelope. "Just came, sir," the messenger said.

Fitz glanced at the handwriting. Biddy's. "At last!" he muttered. He tore open the envelope and began reading. Halfway through the first paragraph, he groped behind him for a chair and sat down.

Dear Fitz:

This is a rather difficult letter to write. A man in my position would naturally find it hard to accuse his superior of stupidity, gross misconduct, neglect of duty. But I have no alternative. In fact I must go even further and accuse you of persecution, of hounding a fine, wonderful woman and—I must face up to it squarely—of actually attempting to frame her. I can attribute this only to your laziness. Your conduct can only be traced to your reluctance to extend the effort necessary to solve the crime in question.

Either that, or you are a victim of misjudgment so monstrous as to be criminal on your own part.

Regardless, allow me to enlighten you as to the true state of affairs. Sylvia Spurdick is a widow. Her

husband was killed, tragically, three days after her wedding two years ago, in a faulty blast-off from the Venusian pits. She loved him dearly and her grief drove her almost out of her mind.

The man you told me about, is a fine, loyal servant who has but one aim in life—to serve Sylvia as long as he is needed.

Where you dreamed up all that libelous fiction concerning Sylvia and Nigel will be forever beyond me. Words fail me when trying to give you my opinion of such monstrous lies. So I will merely state that Nigel is not a converted Ganymedian or anything else. He is a Terran with a background as fine as yours. Sylvia is not a Georgian. As a matter of fact, she was born in New York City and I'm sure you could locate her records there if you cared to take the trouble.

There is little more to say except that Sylvia has done me the honor of accepting my hand in marriage. This honor is something to be marveled at when you realize she has not looked at another man since the tragic death of her husband. I can only hope I will be able to live up to the standard he set. In attempting to do so, I will use every weapon at my command. Toward this end, I have had two million

units transferred to the Baltic City National Bank and have withdrawn it in cash.

We are leaving on a long honeymoon, after which we will settle down and be happy.

Please consider this as my resignation from the FSSA. I do not want to be associated with an outfit that goes around persecuting helpless women.

Sincerely,
Bidford Payne.

The letter dropped from the detective's nerveless fingers. The possibility which had completely escaped him! That Biddy, even when having been told the truth, would still be vulnerable to the Georgian feline's powers of attraction.

Fitz snatched up the letter and looked at the date. It was seven days old. He snatched up the phone. "Get me the blast pit!" he roared.

A moment later, the superintendent was saying, "The *Baltic Queen*? It's not here. It blasted off more than a week ago. It—hey! You still there?" The superintendent shrugged and hung up. "Crazy man."

The letter from Biddy was a tight wad of paper that Fitz kept rolling in his fingers as he rode to the space port. His eyes were bleak and his mind was filled with grim

thoughts. He'd been a negligent fool not to keep a check on the *Baltic Queen*. It would have been so simple. How would he be able to explain to headquarters that he had overlooked the simple precaution of putting a stop-flight on the ship? A blunder that would probably cost Biddy his life. Six days. Perhaps the boy was already dead.

"If they killed him," Fitz muttered, "I'll turn in my resignation. Then I'll hunt them all over the galaxy. When I find them, I won't worry about any technicalities of evidence."

The *Baltic Queen* rocketed through space. Standing at the port, Biddy looked out into the empty vastness and asked, "By the way, darling, I asked you several times, but you never told me—what course did you have Nigel set?"

Sylvia's laugh was the purr of a cat. "A man in love, my dear, shouldn't worry about such things. You should be thinking only of me. What do you care where we go so long as we are on our way together?"

"Just curious."

"Nigel is a fine pilot. I gave him instructions to see that we were completely alone—

you and I. That's all that is important."

She moved close, for a kiss, then went to the liquor cabinet and returned with two glasses. "Here, my darling. This will raise your spirits."

They touched glasses and drank. She led Biddy to a chair and sat down in his lap. She kissed him, stroked his hair. "Do you feel better now?"

He blinked. "I feel—drowsy."

She purred. "You *were* nice. The nicest, I think, of them all."

His eyes widened for a moment. Then the lids grew heavier. "I—I can't move my arms."

"Of course not. The drug works very swiftly. You will lose consciousness in twenty seconds, my darling. Just time for one more kiss." She laughed and placed her lips against his and held them there until his head dropped.

A few minutes later the cabin door opened. Nigel entered. "Is he out?"

"Completely. He's quite safe to handle now." She noted with amusement, the quick flush that rose into Nigel's face. She laughed and goaded him further. "You weren't interested in handling this one in your usual manner. Why?

Has brutality lost its thrill for you?"

Nigel snarled, pushed the unconscious Biddy to the floor and kicked him viciously. Sylvia continued to be amused. "He was more dangerous than the others, wasn't he darling? Not a fat, helpless little man unable to fight back."

Nigel kicked Biddy in the face, then turned to the port. "I was beginning to think we'd never find a planet or an asteroid."

"You're putting down on this one?"

"Of course. I want to get rid of him."

"Is it uninhabited?"

"Look for yourself. I've circled it five times. There's no sign of a living thing."

She stretched lazily. "Good. I was beginning to get a trifle bored with him. So young. So naive." She turned a smile on Nigel. "I'm afraid you and I were made for each other, darling. Get rid of him quickly."

Nigel reached for her. She slipped away from him. "Later," she said. "He might come to and spoil your nice profile. Get him into his chains."

Biddy opened his aching eyes and looked out across the barren, rocky surface of the planet. He moved his thick

parched lips to curse. What a fool he'd been! How could a sane man have been so stupid? He tested the chains on his wrists and ankles. No chance of breaking them. Well, he wouldn't be a sane man long. He'd be a skeleton and maybe they'd find him some day—pick up his bones in a basket and take them to Frisco where the smart boys could make exhaustive tests and tell the working detective in charge of the case: We've got news for you. This guy is dead.

Biddy laughed, but only briefly. The effort made his head hurt too much. He squinted up into the sky, where a blue-white sun shot down its pitiless rays. He wished to hell he had a good stiff drink.

He closed his eyes and wondered how bad it would be. After a while, he'd heard, a man lost his thirst, lost his pain, lost everything, lay in a coma. That would be fine, but what went on before the coma? Pretty uncomfortable no doubt. Uncomfortable both physically and mentally. It would be rough, and thinking about Fitz wasn't going to help a bit. He'll certainly have me pegged for an idiot, Biddy thought. They'll find my bones and if they throw him

the case, I'll bet he'll refuse to take it.

Biddy closed his eyes. He slept.

"Biddy! Biddy! For God's sake! Are you still alive? Open your eyes, boy!"

Biddy opened his eyes. He was dreaming. That, or he'd passed from the realm of reason into the land of fantasy, because Fitz was on his knees, breathing in his face, pouring cool water into his mouth. Biddy moved his tongue. The water seemed real enough. You'd swear it was the genuine article. Great place, this world of fantasy. Biddy croaked, "Hello, pal. Did they get you too?"

Fitz sat back and wiped the sweat from his face. "I thought you were a goner, boy. You've been here almost a week. That would kill an ordinary man."

"We freaks are immune to almost everything. How about a good drink of that water."

Fitz held the canteen. "Take it easy. Not too much. Then lie still and rest 'til the monks get here. They're on the way with tools to cut you loose. I spotted you and ran on ahead."

"The monks. What monks?"

"Why, this is the planet I

told you about—or thought I did. It was colonized in 2085 by an order of penitents who—”

“Wait a minute. Are you telling me—” Biddy’s head dropped. He had passed out.

Biddy opened his eyes. There was a spinning gray blur all around him. Then it slowed down and took on various solid forms. He lay on a hard cot, obviously in a cave of some sort. Around him stood several figures, cowed and robed in black. One of them said, “Rejoice, my brothers. God has seen fit to spare our friend. I am sure he will mend quickly, now. Let us go to the chapel and thank Him for His mercy.”

They filed out and Biddy saw Fitz standing by the cot. Biddy shook his head to clear the fog and said, “Are you telling me that of all the millions of planets in the galaxy, that pair just happened to land on the only one inhabited by an order of monks?”

Fitz grinned. The grin lighted his ugly face; made it almost handsome. “You’ve got a one-track mind.”

“I asked you.”

“Of course not. I arranged that. It was a part of my original plan. I got on the *Baltic Queen* with an inspector’s

badge and planted a robot pilot under the cowlings. Then I set a course for them and connected their controls to a gyro so their dials would register accurately off the disconnected controls.”

“I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Very few people have. It’s a device used only by FSSA. Very hush-hush.”

“Well, I’ll be damned.”

“I’d figured on coming on ahead after I got the word from you, and having the monks spotted all over this planet to watch for you. I had it all figured out to work as smooth as grease, but when you fell for that cat’s charms—”

“Fell for her!”

“I got your letter—”

“I didn’t fall for her. They found out I was a cop and I saw our whole plan shot to pieces, so I put on the act. It was all I could do to try and save the play.”

“Why, good God, boy! You must have been crazy. How did you think you could pull it off alone?”

“I—I didn’t know exactly, but I had to try. I figured on staying alert and looking for breaks. I thought that maybe when that Ganymedian freak jumped me and tried to kick my teeth in I’d arrest them

both. But he didn't even try. The cat drugged me."

"I could have told you he wouldn't risk a swing at you. Those Ganymedian counterfeits are yellow right down to the bone. He was afraid of you, boy."

Biddy smiled without humor. "Well, regardless, we've failed. They'll go so far away now, that we couldn't locate them if we had eleven lives apiece."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why will they go away?"

"Because—say, that's right. They don't know you found me. They'll go back to Baltic City and look for another sucker!"

"Wrong again," Fitz said. "They won't go back to Baltic City, either."

"Listen, will you tell me what in hell—"

"I'll tell you nothing until you get some sleep."

And Fitz walked out of the cave.

A week later, Fitz entered Biddy's cave. "Ready to travel?"

"I was ready an hour after I got here."

"Good. We're blasting off."

They said good-bye to the monks and entered space in Fitz's two-man ship. Biddy

said, "We heading for Baltic City?"

"No—Frisco."

"That's right. You said they wouldn't go back to Baltic. Are they in Frisco?"

"No."

"Then where are they?"

"It would be a little hard to say."

"Are we going on with the case?"

"Not at the moment."

"Is it being filed under *unsolved*?"

"No."

"Closed?"

"No."

"Then what in hell is the status of the thing?"

"It's hanging fire."

"And how long will it hang?"

"That's hard to say."

"Well I'll be—"

"There's a smuggling case. It's been assigned to us. Do you feel up to it? I can get you a leave."

"The hell with that. I'm up to it. But about those two—"

"How about pouring a drink for us. Then I'm going to take a nap."

"All right! Then don't talk!"

Fitz emptied his glass and took a nap.

Two months later, when Biddy entered the office, Fitz

said, "How would you like to take a run out into the galaxy?"

"A new case?"

"No, an old one. We blast in an hour."

The ship traveled two days on an automatic pilot. Toward the end of the second day, Fitz was seated in the main cabin studying his chronometer. Biddy looked up from his book and said, "Why do you keep looking at that watch? You expecting someone?"

Fitz snapped the second hand. "As a matter of fact, I am." He got up and went to the port. "Want to see who it is?"

Biddy walked over and looked out. His eyes widened. "Good Lord! The *Baltic Queen*!"

"Right."

"But where—how?"

"I told you how I aimed them at the monk's planet with a hidden robot pilot. I didn't stop there. After they left the planet, the *Baltic Queen* kept right on traveling in a big orbit—precharted—to nowhere."

"They've been traveling, helplessly, for two months?"

"Exactly. They no doubt realize they're on a robot pilot but they can't get at it from inside the ship—not

without a blow torch, and they haven't got a single one."

"But why did you leave them out here for two months?"

"You'll see. Claw onto the ship and fasten the air lock hatches together. We'll cut through."

Half an hour later, the ship was broached. Fitz said, "I'll go first."

"All right, but watch out for Nigel. He's tricky."

"I don't think we'll have to worry about him," Fitz said.

"Why not?"

"Look for yourself."

Fitz pointed to the floor of the companionway. It was strewn with scraps of flesh and gnawed bones.

"Good God! Is that—?"

"Right. All that's left of Nigel."

"Where's Sylvia?"

"We'll see—stay behind me."

They moved down the companionway until they came to the door of the main cabin. Fitz said, "Careful, now," and pushed it slowly open.

A high-pitched snarl tore at their ears, and Fitz slammed the door just as a thunderbolt hit it from the inside. Biddy leaped back with sudden sickness in his eyes. "What in the name of—"

Fitz took a small heat gun from his pocket. "I'm going to open it again." He threw the door open and snapped a searing blast in front of the monstrosity that was again set to leap at them. "Back, cat—back!"

Biddy stood frozen as he stared. "It—it can't be!"

"She reverted," Fitz said.

They stood staring at the red-mawed cat that crouched, snarling against the far wall. Sylvia's clothing was gone. She now wore a coat of soft, gray fur. Her nails had grown into claws and her fur was blood stained and dirt-caked.

"But how could a thing like this happen?" Biddy asked.

"I thought maybe it would. They were bound to find out they were trapped. That panicked both of them and Sylvia, at least, returned to the primitive."

Biddy's face was filled with a mixture of pity and revulsion. "Why did you do it?"

"For two reasons."

"You didn't believe me? You thought I actually was in love with—?"

"No. I was afraid we couldn't convict them. A conviction is pretty hard in a case like this, and I couldn't have those two going back to their old tricks."

"Your other reason?"

"I wanted a graphic case to lay before the Federated Congress. Those Georgian felines should be outlawed. It was a mistake to upgrade them to human level. Maybe some before - and - after pictures will—"

"But such a heartless, horrible—"

"Remember the men these two killed," Fitz said, grimly. "Remember that skeleton chained to the rock. And God knows how many more of them are floating around the galaxy."

"I guess you're right."

"Why don't you get the money you gave her as bait. She'll have no further use for it."

"Then what are we going to do?"

"Tow this charnel house back to civilization—after I feed this cat."

"Feed her?"

"I brought a side of beef along. You'll find it in the freezer."

Sylvia's slit eyes glowed. A raspy purr issued from the furry throat. She stretched her sleek body in a manner highly remindful of a sensuous woman.

"See?" Fitz said. "She's hungry."

THE END



The crown now rested on his head—but where was his head to rest?

King of the

BLACK SUNRISE

By MILTON LESSER

No man is willing to walk deliberately into the jaws of death—not when he knows there's not a chance in ten millions of coming out alive. Yet Kent Taggert agreed to risk destruction, for the time of the Black Sunrise was at hand—and the fabulous treasure of an entire planet could be had for the taking!

I WAS telling Gurr the Ar-givian what it's like in Terra City when the sun goes down across the bay, burnishing the spires and towers like molten copper, when the Earthmen came in. I had known they were here on Ar-

giv. I'd seen their spaceship come shuddering out of sub-space. But I turned my back on them and ordered another drink and told Gurr with my eyes to go away, when I felt a hand drop firmly on my shoulder.



"You're Kent Taggart," the girl said.

"Not me, lady." But damn her, she was studying my profile and nodding.

"You don't have to lie. I've seen pictures of you. I'd know you anywhere."

"Don't you watch the newsvids, lady? Kent Taggart is dead."

"That's where I saw your picture. On the newsvids."

"Maybe I look like him a little."

"You can just stop it, Kent Taggart. An outworlder on Cephlus told us you were alive, told us you were here in Argiv City. We need you, Taggart."

"Nobody needs me," I said. I looked at her for the first time. She was beautiful. So damned beautiful and so damned sure of herself I felt like poking her one.

"Then you admit it? You're Taggart?"

"I admit nothing."

"If we hire you without asking your name, will you join us?"

"No."

"We'll pay you well—Taggart."

"Definitely, no."

"Listen, you fool." The voice suddenly became hard. Not cruel, but hard. It was barely above a whisper. I

could smell her perfume, not the kind that slams two sexy fists into your nostrils but the subtle kind, like the girls can buy only on Earth. "Let me tell you something. There was a man from the W.B.I. on our ship. He's here on Argiv. He was also on Cephlus. He's looking for you."

The W.B.I. The World Bureau of Investigation. It could be. The Council of the Worlds had passed a blanket extradition law for me. That's why I'm here on Argiv. No Earthman bothers coming to Argiv. *Almost* no Earthman.

I was all set to tell her she could go and shove it. But just then the door to Gurr's Tavern—it's the only tavern at the only spaceport on Argiv—opened. Blinding light from the three Argivian suns stabbed into the room. When I could see again, another Earthman had joined the girl's two silent companions. He was trying too hard not to look like law. He was law, all right.

"I haven't much time, Taggart," the girl whispered quickly. "We're going up-country. The outworlder on Cephlus said you've been spending your time between Cephlus and Argiv. You know this planet. Better than any other Earthman. Better than

most Argivians. We'll hire you as a guide and you can stop worrying about the W.B.I.—for a while."

"What the hell do you want up-country?"

"The same as anybody else wants."

"They never find it."

"They never look for it right before the Black Sunrise, do they?"

"You know about that?" I asked. I tried not to show it, but there was sudden respect in my voice.

"We're no amateurs, Taggart. What do you say?"

I shrugged, thinking. If an Earthman or any other outworlder left Argiv City during Black Sunrise, it was as good as committing suicide. It was better. A suicide might change his mind, but an alien on Argiv during Black Sunrise couldn't. I let my gaze wander across the room to where the W.B.I. man was sitting with the girl's two companions. His eyes were waiting for mine, locked with them. He smiled. Not a nice smile.

"When can you start?" I asked the girl.

"Whenever you say."

"All right. I want five hundred credits."

"Out of which you'll pay

for our supplies and bearers."

"For myself."

"No, Taggart."

"Then four hundred for myself."

"We'll give you one hundred."

"You can shove it—" I began.

"And ten percent of what we find up-country."

". . . O.K. I'll get supplies and bearers. You see that W.B.I. man? You can hit him over the head or make love to him or anything you want, but keep him away from me till we're ready to start."

"I'll take care of him. When do we start?"

I grinned at her. She didn't like the grin and looked away. "Don't bother to unpack," I said.

Gurr, who had used the galaxy-wide barman's prerogative to eavesdrop, was scowling. His usually flabby purple skin was stretched taut over his cheekbones, baring the yellow fangs in his mouth. "Why don't you pick an easy way to die, Taggart?" he said.

II

"This is Dr. Kidder," the girl told me two hours later, when we were on the trail. I nodded mechanically at Dr. Kidder and shook his hand,

but I was looking over his shoulder through the brilliant mauve light of Argiv's perpetual day—make that *almost* perpetual—at the tiny distant cubes of Argiv City's sundried brick buildings and thinking that it was the only outpost of civilization on Argiv, which meant the only one in a couple of square parsecs of space.

"A pleasure, Mr. Taggart," Dr. Kidder said.

"And this is Larry Cotten, Taggart," the girl told me.

Cotten had a firm handshake and bold, angry eyes. He was a good-looking guy, tall and straight with a mouthful of flashing white teeth. I looked at the girl and looked at Cotten, still smiling at me with his mouth only, and I figured maybe there was something between them. Well, what the hell did I care? But for some reason I hated Cotten and looking at his face knew that he hated me, too.

"I never did get your name," I told the girl.

"I'm Helen Purcell. We're quite a crew, aren't we, Taggart? A professor of archaeology, an ex-video actress—"

"You used to act?" I asked. She was pretty enough, with long golden hair and blue eyes which looked purple under the three suns of Argiv, and a figure

in the whipcord britches and boots and tight whipcord blouse which kept trying to pull your eyes from their sockets.

"I tried," Helen said. "And then there's Larry, who's a—"

"Why don't you come off it?" Cotten demanded. "It's no business of Taggart's what we used to do. We're not asking *him*, are we?"

"No," I admitted. But if they knew my name, they knew all about me. I was kind of a celebrity all over the galaxy. The only convicted murderer to escape from Earth in something like fifty years. "What got you interested in the Treasure of the Black Sunrise?" I asked.

Helen shrugged. "Do you think we'll find it?"

"No, but it's your money your're spending. I think you'll be lucky to get back alive."

"The local chamber of commerce ought to tar and feather this guy," Cotten said brightly.

Our bearers, big flabby purple-skinned Argivians like Gurr, were just struggling up the rise of ground to our left, joining us with the expedition's equipment. I jabbered at the chief bearer, a tall old purple fellow with a shock of bright yellow hair like straw,

name of Bonoi. My Argivian's a little rusty because Gurr and some of the other Argivians at the spaceport speak English, but pretty soon Bonoi got the idea, flat-footed it back to one of the young bearers and soon returned to us with four blasters.

I buckled mine on and passed them around. "Aren't you being a little melodramatic?" Cotten asked me.

"Suit yourself," I said. "I know I want to be wearing one when Black Sunrise comes. And maybe before."

Just a look, no words, passed between Helen and Cotton. He ran the blaster belt around his waist but gave her a cynical smile. Dr. Kidder asked me, "Do all three Argivian suns really go down at once during Black Sunrise?"

I nodded. "It's sunset, really, not sunrise. But that's what they call it. The Argivians are a primitive people, doctor. You're an archaeologist, so maybe you know."

"You're confusing it with anthropology."

"Well, anyway. It happens once every three years. It's the only time the Argivians have darkness. They get scared. More scared than you'll ever see any primitive people get. They have three

gods in their religion, Dr. Kidder." I pointed up through the spear-tipped foliage at two of Argiv's three suns overhead, then pointed northwest to the third one on the horizon. "Three sun gods. When Black Sunrise comes, they pray and make sacrifices and give offerings for the return of their gods."

"Why is it so dangerous?" Dr. Kidder wanted to know.

"Because we're Earthmen. Because we have spaceships. We travel in the sky with our ships, you see. Their witch doctors tell them that once every three years the Earthmen, riding their flashing Earth ships, kidnap the three suns. When you get right down to it, that's a pretty logical explanation."

"The hell with all this hocus-pocus," Larry Cotten said. "What about the Treasure of the Black Sunrise?"

"What about it?" I shrugged. "You probably know more about it than I do."

We were on the move now, plodding forward slowly through the dense undergrowth. When I looked back, I could no longer see the buildings of Argiv City.

"All we know," Helen told me, "is this: it's worth a fortune."

"It's out there in the jungle

somewhere," I said. "The bearers probably know where. Gurr—he's the barman back at Argiv City—knows where. Once he told me. It's in a cave. They say a delicate photo-sensitive mechanism guards it. The entrance is attuned to light-pressure. Except for one night every three years, it's never dark on Argiv. That one night, the cave opens. Naturally, the Argivians bring rich offerings to the Shrine of the Three Gods. They also perform their weird rites on that one night, but they have to get out by sunrise. Because once light strikes the door, it will close automatically, and there's no opening it for three more years."

"Any idea how long they've been piling up treasure in this shrine of theirs?" Cotten asked eagerly.

"Thousands of years, according to Gurr."

"Thousands of years!" Cotten's eyes grew very bright, but he was seeing nothing of the jungle or the trail we were on. I'd seen other Earthmen on Argiv like that before. Some of them never got up enough courage to head into the up-country, as we were doing. But others had come this way before us. And had disappeared. . . .

"King Solomon's Mines, a hundred parsecs out in deep space," Cotten mused, still dreamy-eyed.

Just then Bonoi tapped my shoulder and pointed at the horizon. The green sun, Argiv's smallest, was setting. "This sleep period," said Bonoi in his harsh, sibilant language, "the Green God vanishes. Next sleep period, the Yellow God follows. And two sleep periods hence, the Purple God, greatest of all. After that, it is the time of the Black Sunrise."

"So what?" I said. "You knew that before we started. That's why I picked you, Bonoi." I hoped my Argivian was getting across to him. "Gurr told me you're a civilized man."

Bonoi smiled, rubbing the edge of his fist against his long, thin purple nose. "For three years I am civilized, Earthman," he said. "But one night every three years, no Argivian can forget his past. Is it not so even in the city?"

I nodded. I had been in Argiv City before at the time of the Black Sunrise. It wasn't safe on the streets for an Earthman or any out-worlder. "What's the matter?" I said. "Are your men complaining? They knew where we were

going. They haven't been on the trail half an hour."

"They are as children," Bonoï told me. "For me, it does not matter. I merely would have you know the danger. I will accompany you. But these others . . . the thought of your money was too much for them, back in the city. Now they do not know."

"They want to leave us?"

"Yes, Earthman. I am sorry. It has come to them with seeing the first god vanish, the Green God."

"What's he talking about?" Cotten demanded irritably.

I shook my head and said, "Let me handle it."

"I just want to know what he's jabbering about, that's all."

"I can straighten it out, I think."

"Look here, Taggart. We're paying you. You aren't running things, we are."

I smiled coldly at him and turned to Helen. "Is that the way you feel, too? And Dr. Kidder?"

"No, Taggart," she said.

"You probably know what's best," Dr. Kidder told me. "But you might let us know what Bonoï wants."

"His men are afraid because the green sun is setting. They want to go back."

"Already?" said Cotten, throwing back his head and laughing. "They're nothing but a lot of superstitious savages."

"It's their religion."

"I'm not interested in their religion. I'm interested in their treasure. You can forget all about being polite and tell Bonoï his men signed up to come with us." Cotten fingered the blaster at his belt. "We can't go ahead without them, and they know it. Well, they're coming with us—or else."

"I can't tell them that," I said. "It's the wrong way to handle them."

"Let's have none of that crap, Taggart. We know all about you. There's a W.B.I. man waiting back in Argiv City for you."

I wanted to hit him. I wanted to see blood spill from that hard handsome mouth. Maybe I would have hit him too, but Helen moved between us. "Cut it out, Larry," she said levelly. "As far as we're concerned, Taggart's a free man, not a fugitive."

I began to smile, but stopped.

"Still, Taggart," Helen went on, "you ought to take Larry's suggestion."

Shrugging, I told Bonoï, "If you're still on our side, do

your men have a spokesman among them?"

"Yes, Earthman." And Bonoï trotted off to the long sweating line of bearers. Moments later, he returned with a young Argivian, a well-muscled purple giant who had not yet been plagued with the flab to which middle-aged Argivians are so prone.

"This is Karpa-ton," Bonoï told me. "He would speak with you."

Karpa-ton had a deep, rich voice—and a one-track mind. "Either you must go back," he said, "or we must go back. Alone, we could go on without you to the Shrine of the Three Gods. Or we will return to the city and let you go on alone. It is not possible for us to continue together."

"You didn't say any of that when I hired you a couple of hours ago," I pointed out heatedly.

But Bonoï said, "My people are children, Earthman. They have no time sense unless, like your servant Bonoï, they have lived among the Earthmen in Argiv City. They did not know the Time of the Black Sunrise was approaching until now, when they can see with their own eyes that the Green God vanishes. You cannot blame them."

"Nevertheless, we're going ahead. All of us."

Karpa-ton shook his purple head, the hairless pate catching the last deep green rays of the setting sun. You could see a thin film of sweat on his pate and the stubbly bristles of his yellow hair which, being a young Argivian, he would shave every day. "We go no further with you, Earthman."

I told this to Cotten, who scowled and said, "Tell him it's an order. Tell him they come with us."

"The Earthman commands you," I said to Karpa-ton.

"No out-worlder commands an Argivian. Least of all at the Time of the Black Sunrise."

"It is his command," I said again.

"Then," said Karpa-ton arrogantly, "he must be prepared to back his words with actions." And he marched off toward the other bearers.

"Wait a minute!" Cotten cried. "Tell him to come right back here, Taggart."

"Hey, Karpa-ton!" I called. When he returned, his face looked very grim. "The Earthman who hired me to hire you insists—"

"Enough! You think we are animals or slaves that we may be so commanded?"

"What's he saying?" Cotten demanded.

"That they're not slaves."

"Yeah? I've got news for them. If we don't show them who's boss now, we never will. What's his name, Karpaton?" And, after I had nodded: "Karpa-ton, get down on your knees."

Karpa-ton stood there, waiting.

"He doesn't understand," I said.

"Then tell him."

All the other Argivians stood about in a circle now, watching us. I looked at Helen, who turned away. She didn't think Cotten had the right idea, but along with Dr. Kidder, she was Cotten's partner. Me, I was just the hired help. I was getting as angry as Karpa-ton. I said. "The Earthman wants you to bend your knee before him, Karpa-ton."

Karpa-ton's laughter bubbled in his throat and then roared out between his thin lips. Cotten's face flushed an angry red, but he stood there and took the laughter until Helen giggled. Then Cotten reached for his blaster and with one blurring motion slashed the barrel across Karpa-ton's face. The purple man stood there until the blood

welled suddenly from the gash across his cheekbone. Then with one big fist he knocked the blaster from Cotten's hand and with the other, great fingers extended and curling, began to squeeze Cotten's throat.

I sighed wearily. It was going bad, here at the beginning. Karpa-ton was right, but Cotten was an Earthman and although I'd been running from Earthmen the last half dozen years, I'm one too. I put my hand on Karpa-ton's shoulder and spun him around and said, "That's enough."

Cotten reeled back. He would have fallen, had not Helen and Dr. Kidder supported him. I was going to tell him to leave dealing with the Argivians in my hands from now on, when I caught a blur of motion out of the corner of my eye.

I barely had time to duck, taking Karpa-ton's huge fist high on my forehead. He was berserk now, with blood lust and religious fervor. Cotten, Helen, Dr. Kidder, me — we were all the same now, Earthmen and despised. I caught Karpa-ton's wild left on the palm of my hand, and jabbed two extended fingers of my free hand for his eyes. It was not enough to gouge them out, but enough to blind him.

Karpa-ton staggered after me, unseeing, a big, helpless, lumbering giant. Regretting it, I measured him carefully and felled him with a right cross. It was quick and clean and deposited Karpa-ton, unconscious, at my feet.

"You're strong, Taggart," Helen said.

I looked at her in disgust. I walked away and didn't talk to anyone for a long time. Two bearers came and picked up Karpa-ton, and then all of them marched back down the trail toward Argiv City. Bonoi came over to me and said, "I am sorry, Earthman, but now I must go with them, too."

They left our equipment in great piles on the rotting jungle floor.

A few moments later, a distant moaning wind sprang up, fluttering the jungle foliage as it approached. I knew that wind well, I remembered it from three years ago in Argiv City. It was the Wailing Wind. The Wind of the Green God, which now had dipped below the horizon. And far away, straight ahead of us through the jungle, so far that the sound was almost lost on the wind, I heard another wailing noise, musical, rhythmic, weird. The strange double-reed instruments of

the Argivian priests, wailing the loss of their God.

III

"That's right, Taggart," Cotten said later. "We're going on, anyway."

"You can't."

"We're not going to wait three years for another chance."

"Well, you can just count me out."

"You yellow bastard!" Cotten roared.

"Was he yellow when he saved your life?" Helen said. "That purple man would have strangled you."

"He's yellow if he leaves us out here alone. He knows the way. We don't."

"I can't blame you if you go, Taggart," Helen said slowly.

"You'll stay with him? You and Dr. Kidder?"

"Yes. We're in this together."

"Even if I leave?"

"Yes."

"Listen," I said. "Without bearers, you don't have a chance. Sure, I know the way, but not like an Argivian does. Maybe with Bonoi alone, without the bearers, we could have made it. But not alone. Definitely not alone."

"There are dangerous ani-

mals in the jungle?" Dr. Kidder asked.

"Maybe. I don't know. That isn't it, doctor. We can take care of the animals. I'm thinking of the Argivians who will be out at their shrine for the Black Sunrise."

"We're Earthmen," Cotten said arrogantly. "We have nothing to fear from savages."

"They sacrifice to their three kidnapped gods," I said. "Old and sick Argivians if there's no one else. But they prefer out-worlders. Any out-worlders will do, but they like Earthmen best."

"I have nothing against you," said Cotten blandly. "You're still in this for ten percent if you want."

I looked at him. Then at Dr. Kidder, and Helen. There was mute appeal in her eyes. She wanted me to stay, but she was too proud to say so. I thought of the way she had looked at me after how I'd handled Karpa-ton. With hero worship in her eyes, almost. Then it disgusted me. Now, all at once, it did not. I wanted her to look at me like that again. I knew what my answer would be. I would go with them.

And then Cotten said, "But if you don't want the ten percent, if you're planning on

deserting us, I'm going to report you to the W.B.I. when we return to Argiv City."

I stared at him without speaking. Helen bit her lip. Then I found my own gear in one of the piles of equipment the Argivians had left behind them and began to trudge with its weight on my shoulders back down the trail toward Argiv City. The jungle floor, like all jungle floors, was covered with a thick matting of rotting vegetation. I heard nothing but a faint rustling sound until I felt Helen's hand on my shoulder.

"Well, what is it?" I asked coldly.

"For me," she said. "I'm asking you to do it for me, Taggart."

"To go with you to the shrine?"

"Yes. I can't go back now. I've dreamed of this too long. I can't go back and if I go ahead without you, I'll — I'll probably be killed, won't I?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm begging you, Taggart. I can't apologize for Cotten's behavior. I'm not Cotten. I'm begging you for me. There's no turning back for me, now. I won't stop until I've found that treasure—or died trying."

"Why?" I said.

"Why? I don't know why. It's the way I am. It's me, Taggert. I'm honest with myself."

"If you're going to commit suicide, I don't see why I should."

"Because I stand here asking you," she said, "that's why. Because I'm begging you."

Had she been cheap about it, had she thrown her arms around my neck and offered me her lips, I would have been able to refuse. But damn her, she was begging me—and that was all. I nodded finally.

"I'll go with you," I said.

Helen's eyes were moist, her lips slack and parted. She looked like she'd just been made love to: the treasure was that important to her. As we walked back toward the others, she took my hand and held it, drew my arm against her side. I could feel her heart pounding against her ribs and I thought, she wouldn't be cheap about it. She wouldn't offer herself to me before I gave her my answer, but she was ready to offer herself now. I grinned. It was a long way to the Shrine of the Three Gods and the nights, with the green sun down, and then the yellow one, and fin-

ally the purple sun, would be cold.

I stopped grinning as we neared the others. Helen's arm which was linked in mine pressed more possessively, but she was looking at Cotten. She smiled right into his eyes, coldly. A challenge, I thought. She's challenging Cotten with me. That was all there was to it. Wrap up your dreams, Taggert, I thought. You'll be as cold as anyone else on the long nights between here and the Shrine.

We held a brief council of war. Antagonism flared between Cotten and me again. "We'll have to leave most of this equipment behind," I said.

"That's expensive stuff," Cotten sneered. "It's all right for you to say. You didn't pay for it."

"Do you want to carry it through the jungle?"

"We can carry some of it."

"You can carry what you want," I said. "I'm taking only what I have to." I patted the blaster strapped about my waist. "This," I said. "This is essential."

"Damn you, Taggert! You'll do what I tell you to."

I shook my head. "No. I go along under one condition. I take orders from no one."

"The typical, snot-nosed expatriate—" Cotten began.

But Helen said, "That's enough, Larry: Taggart knows more about the pickle we're in than you do. I think we ought to take orders from Taggart."

Cotten's handsome face flushed, and he looked to Dr. Kidder for support. But the archaeologist shook his head. "Taggart's right," he said. "We'll take weapons. We can forage for food along the way, can't we? Of course, I'll have to take some of my digging equipment, but it isn't very heavy. But that's all."

"That's all," said Helen.

Cotten grumbled something I didn't hear, and then we began to march. After a while, we came to accept the distant wailing notes of the Argivian religious music. I began to think we were getting closer to the sound, but jungle noises are deceptive and we still had a long way to go.

Several hours later, as we passed through a narrow defile, I found clusters of large yellow berries which I'd seen the Argivians eat in Argiv City. We supped on them and made ready to bivouac in the open. Cotten said something about the stupidity of leaving our tents behind, but no one

paid any attention. Then, while Dr. Kidder and Helen kindled a fire, I went off into the brush looking for game.

I returned in half an hour with the carcass of a blasted *kinpo*, a small Argivian antelope, slung across my shoulder. Helen said, "You look like Tarzan of the Apes."

"I feel even hungrier," I told her, and proved it after the carcass had been roasted over the fire.

"We'll divide the sleeping period into four watches," I said later.

"Three," Cotten told me. "Helen doesn't have to—"

"I want to," she said.

"What do we have to be afraid of, anyway?" Cotten wanted to know. "I haven't seen any signs of large animals."

"Karpa-ton," I told him, and lay down to get some sleep. Dr. Kidder, who said he wasn't sleepy, took the first watch. Cotten was next, and then Helen. I would take the final watch.

I slept deeply and well, and when Helen's hand on my shoulder roused me, I felt rested and refreshed. "Anything cooking?" I said.

"No. Only that music. Hear it?"

I did. The wailing double-reeds were worse than drums.

They got inside you somehow and churned up something which mankind has forgotten for thousands of years but which still resides in his dim ancestral memory. They worked on the vestigial nerves at the base of your neck and played, like tiny needles of ice, up and down your spine.

"I'm not sleepy," Helen said. "Mind if I keep watch with you?"

I shrugged, shaking my head. I looked at the others. Dr. Kidder was curled up comfortably near the fire, sleeping soundly. Cotten, big and rangy, slept restlessly.

"Did you mean what you said about Karpa-ton?" Helen asked.

"Yes. He won't forget what happened."

"But there's an Earth consulate on Argiv. He wouldn't dare—"

"Black Sunrise," I reminded her.

There was silence for a long time after that. I stared straight ahead into the purple-tinted foliage, thinking that Helen had gone to sleep. But finally she said, "Taggart?"

"I'm listening."

"Did you really kill that man on Earth?"

I grinned.

"What's so funny?"

"It's just funny, that's all."

"Why?"

"I've met a lot of Earthmen on the out-worlds. You're the first one who ever asked me that."

"You haven't answered. Did you kill him?"

"Does it matter?"

"It matters to me."

"No," I said. "I didn't kill him."

"I'm glad, Taggart."

"Don't be. I wanted to kill him. I was chasing him. There was an accident. He died that way."

"I'll bet it was over a woman."

"Yeah? Why?"

"Because I know you, Taggart. It wouldn't be over money. Either money or a woman. What else is there to kill a man for?"

"It was a woman," I admitted.

"Married?"

"Yeah, my wife. But she was no good. I found out the hard way."

"Taggart, I'm sorry."

I laughed softly, watching the embers crumble to ash in the fire. "I'm not," I said. "I would have remained on Earth all my life. This way, at least I've seen most of the galaxy."

"Sweet lemon?" said Helen.

But there was no malice in her voice.

"Maybe. But thanks for asking."

"Can't you go back and prove it?"

"I don't want to, and that's the truth. I wouldn't be happy there."

"You must have loved her a lot."

"Not now I don't."

"I like you, Taggert. That's the way you are. You love hard and you hate hard."

I shut my eyes and let the dull red warmth of the fire beat against the lids. I heard her moving around, and then I could smell her perfume. All at once I felt her lips brush with the lightest feather touch across my cheek, against my own lips. I sat up. "What's that for?" I said.

"For telling me the truth."

I got my arms around her and leaned over and kissed her mouth, hard. Her lips at first were stiff with surprise, but then they parted for me. It was a long kiss, and a good one.

"What's that for?" Helen said afterwards.

"For asking," I told her.

"I'll keep on asking, if you want."

"I want," I said.

But Cotten was sitting up and staring at us. He said

nothing, but he didn't have to. It was there in his eyes.

IV

Two sleeping periods later, the yellow sun went down. It was quite cold after that, for although the purple one is the brightest of the three Argivian suns, it was now low on the southern horizon. The Argivian music, which never stopped now, had worked on us slowly. I could see it in the others' eyes, in their nervous gestures, in the fitful way they slept, as if they heard the music even while sleeping, and were being moved to slow subconscious frenzy by it.

"We're near the shrine now," I said, as we broke camp with only the purple sun in the sky, its lower rim already below the horizon. Gloomy purple dusk pervaded the jungle.

"How do you know?" Dr. Kidder asked me.

I pointed at the high hills which, bleak and saw-toothed, reared their fangs above the foliage ahead of us and bit into the purple sky. "The Argivians say the Shrine of the Three Gods lies at the base of those hills."

"How will we recognize it, Kent?" Helen demanded.

"Listen to the music," I

said. "The Argivians are there now, at the Shrine, waiting for it to open. All we have to do is follow our ears."

"So now it's Kent," Cotten growled. I looked at him in surprise. He'd been carrying his resentment in silence until now. But his eyes were furtive and red-rimmed, and a muscle twitched at the base of his jaw. It was the Argivian music, I thought. That and Cotten's personality, for the music would affect a man according to his own assets and shortcomings.

"What do you mean by that?" Helen asked him coldly.

"It's pretty clear, isn't it?"

She shook her head, walking toward him slowly. "I want you to say it, Larry."

He flushed and told her, "You used to look at me the same way you're looking at Taggart now."

"I never looked at you any way at all. If you thought I did, it was your imagination."

"Oh, forget it," Cotten said.

"And any way I look at Kent Taggart is my business and his and nothing for you to talk about. You understand?"

"I understand a lot of things now," Cotten said.

"Such as what?"

She was pushing him, I

thought. I didn't know yet if I approved or not, but I stood there in silence and waited.

"Such as what kind of a girl you are."

I realized Helen had needled him some, but that did it. Fists clenched at my sides, I walked over to Cotten. "The lady wants an apology," I said.

Cotten told me to go and do something which I could neither do nor expect to see in print. "She wants an apology for you using that kind of language in front of her too," I said.

Cotten smirked. "The very gallant Mr. Kent Taggart—fugitive and murderer."

It was then that Helen slapped his face. It was a hard open-handed blow and it sent Cotten reeling a step down the trail. For an instant Helen's handprint was very white on his cheek, then flooded with red. He growled like an animal or an Argivian in the music trance, then came for her. He grabbed her arm at the wrist and began to twist it.

That was as far as he got. I wrenched his fingers from around Helen's wrist and cuffed him across the jaw with my knuckles. He swung a wild right, lunging after it

awkwardly and calling me nasty names. I ducked and let him wrap himself around my shoulder with the wild blow, then drove my left fist twice into his gut and my right, short and hard, over his heart. He clawed me as he went down, and I was good and mad. Only the fact that Helen was there watching stopped me from giving him a knee in his mouth on the way down. Women don't think that's a fair way to fight. Somehow, for them, you can only use your fists.

"Enough?" I said. I stood over Cotten with my fists balled, waiting.

He sat there. "Apologize to the lady," I said.

He shook his head and sucked in great lungfulls of air. He did not yet have enough strength to get up.

"He doesn't have to apologize, Kent," Helen said. "Maybe I deserved it. I was egging him on."

"Well—" I started. Now it was my turn to be stubborn.

But Dr. Kidder said: "I'd like to remind all of you that there are more convenient places to fight or make love than the Argivian jungle. We're out here after the treasure of the Black Sunrise, or did you forget it?" His eyes behind the glasses were

not angry, but very annoyed. You could tell he thought he was talking to a bunch of children.

Maybe he was, I thought. I grinned ruefully. "I shouldn't have hit you," I told Cotten, and offered him my hand to help him to his feet.

He scrambled away from me on hands and knees and stood up. "I'm going to get you for that, Taggart," he promised me.

Just then the double-reed Argivian music stopped. I looked at the horizon, where the swollen purple orb of Argiv's biggest sun had now been cut in half. A chill wind knifed across the jungle.

"Why did they stop?" Helen asked me. Her eyes said she did not like the sudden quiet. It was as if the Argivians were waiting for something. For us, maybe.

"The sun," I said, pointing. "For three years its rays shine on the doorway to the Shrine. Then, when it's setting and the angle is no longer right, the door opens. That's what the Argivians were waiting for. They're inside the Shrine now."

"In that case," Dr. Kidder wanted to know, "How are we going to get inside?"

I looked at him, laughing. "That," I said, "is your prob-

lem. That's why no Earthman's ever seen the Treasure of the Black Sunrise and lived to tell of it."

"If we can draw them out of the cave—"

"How? They've waited three years for this, and now that it's come, they're afraid that if they don't keep on praying and worshipping and offering sacrifices at the Shrine of the Three Gods, the kidnapped gods—their suns—will never return. You could not even drive them outside with fire."

"How far are we from the Shrine?" Helen asked me.

"I'm not sure. No more than two or three miles, I figure. You can see the hills. It's right there, at the base of the hills."

"We've got blasters," Cotten said. "We could force our way in."

"Against hundreds of worshippers?" I asked him. "Don't be a fool. Maybe we'd kill some of them, if that's what you want, but in the end they'd get us."

"Instead of standing here talking about it," suggested Dr. Kidder, "why don't we go on to the Shrine?"

I nodded. "We have no choice now. When the purple sun goes down, it will be completely dark. And cold. It

never gets that cold on Earth, not even in the Arctic."

Helen touched my arm with her fingers. "I—I see why you didn't want to come, Kent. If we can get inside the cave somehow, the Argivians will probably kill us."

"Not probably," I said. "They will."

"But if we don't get inside, we'll freeze to death. Kent, we were very foolish coming here. But you were very brave."

"Brave? Why?"

"Because you knew better. You didn't want to come."

"I had no choice. There was the man from the W.B.I."

"No, I mean the second time. Out on the trail. When Bonoi and his bearers left."

"I was foolish, too." I shrugged and added, "Treasure trove. I guess people have gone to worse places than this, looking for it."

We began to walk forward. It was colder now, much colder. We weren't dressed for it and that was my fault, for we'd left warmer garments back on the trail near Argiv City. I'd tried too hard then to get my point across. I walked with my arm around Helen's waist and I could feel her trembling. It was a long way to Earth, but the three

dozen or so miles to Argiv City seemed just as far.

It happened very quickly. Cotten and Dr. Kidder were half a dozen paces ahead of us on the trail, the fading purple light filtering through the foliage to their left. Cotten yelled something and then I heard the brief staccatto blast of his hand-weapon.

"Look out!" Dr. Kidder cried.

Instinctively, I dropped to the ground, pulling Helen down with me. A short Argivian spear sang through air above our heads, burying its bronze head in the trunk of a tree behind us, and quivering there. There was shouting and the stamping of many feet and a single loud wailing note on one of the double-reed instruments.

"Don't move," I hissed at Helen, and scrambled forward on hands and knees, to where Cotten was crouched with his blaster.

"Don't get them any madder than they are," I advised him. "You'll get some of them, but so what?"

For answer, he fired the blaster again. I heard a howl out there somewhere in the dense undergrowth which was now, for the first time in three years, brittle with cold. I tugged at Cotten's arm and

felt the lethal blast of his weapon singe my cheek. I wrestled it from his hand and chucked it in Dr. Kidder's direction. Without standing up, I cupped my hands to my mouth and shouted in the Argivian: "We have sheathed our weapons. We do not resist."

There was a triumphant howling, another clear note from the double-reed instrument, and then silence.

Someone came marching—alone—through the jungle toward us.

If it were any other Argivian, I thought in despair, we might have had some slim hope. But revealing himself through the undergrowth, haughty and arrogant and very grim in the trappings of a Black Sunrise Priest, knee-high boots and rawhide trousers and a mantle of black and gold, the unhealed wound ugly across his cheek, was the Argivian Karpa-ton.

V

Black Sunrise.

Argiv—planet of a triple star system. And once, for one brief terrible night every third year, the three suns set. It was very cold as we approached the Shrine, and very dark. The dark and the cold

seemed to go together. They were the bleak bare womb from which Argiv and every other speck of cosmic dust sprang in the eons-distant, primordial beginning. They were the zenith and the nadir and all in between. They were the sum total of everything and what had gone before worlds and life and man and what would come after them. And something of this the Argivians must have known in their night of the Black Sun rise, something of it they must have sensed in a way no other planetary people could sense it, once every third year when the darkness came.

"I'm so cold, Kent," Helen said. "I—I can hardly walk."

"We're almost there," I said.

Around us were a mob of Argivians. How many, I couldn't tell in the darkness. They didn't touch us. They weren't holding us or leading us or anything, but they had formed a tight circle about us and if we tried to get away we would feel the bronze of their spears. And if we did not? If we managed to escape, what then? We would never survive the cold of Argiv's brief night. They had us and they knew it.

"I see something up ahead," Helen told me. The wind was

fierce now, whipping dead and dying branches against us, tearing at our clothing.

There was something ahead of us—a light, a pinpoint pure white and dazzling, in the complete darkness. The Shrine, I thought. The Shrine of the Three Gods. The Lost Gods. . . .

Someone was shouting now, in the Argivian. I heard Cotten's voice, agonized, in English, and a quick bubbling scream which ended in muffled silence.

Then, for the first time, hands were laid on us. Rough hard hands, but it was so cold I could hardly feel them. I felt myself dragged forward. I didn't care. I wanted it. There was light up ahead — and warmth. Better to die there, with the warmth on your skin and the good white light in your eyes, than out here in the dark numbing cold.

Abruptly, we were thrust inside the cave. It was so unexpectedly bright, I couldn't see. I felt my shoulder scrape against rough stone, felt the cloth of my jacket rip. Then I was stumbling, hand in hand with Helen, and I sensed rather than saw the roof over our head rising high, high, lost in iridescent mist and haze. The cavern was enormous, that I knew. But I

could not see. And by the time my vision returned, we had been herded through the great cavern and beyond it to a passageway so low, you had to stoop to get through it. Here the Argivians left us and departed with the sound of stone grating on stone.

It was a small cave, the walls luminous. It was roughly square, ten paces in each direction. Plenty of room for three people.

Three, not four.

Cotten wasn't with us.

"What happened to Larry?" Helen asked me.

"I don't know. I think he tried to get away."

"They killed him?"

"No. They wouldn't do that, except here in the Shrine."

"What's going to happen to us?"

I shrugged.

Bitterly, Dr. Kidder said, "We were there, in the cavern. With the Treasure of the Black Sunrise. I couldn't see. I was blinded."

"You'll see the treasure," I predicted grimly. "When the Argivians are ready."

"Will we be—sacrificed?" Helen asked.

Again I shrugged. "It's up to the Argivians, not us. But this I know. Each night of the Black Sunrise, they crown a mock king here at the Shrine.

They load him with gifts and treasures and bow to him and mock him and do his fancied bidding. But when the first sun, the green one, sheds light upon the jungle, they kill him."

"One of us?" Dr. Kidder croaked.

"Cotten, probably. That's why he's not with us now. Mostly, the mock king is a sick and old Argivian, but if they can find an Earthman...."

"Stop it," Helen pleaded. "We'll have to save him."

"How?" I asked her. "Do you have any idea how we can save even ourselves. That stone wedged into the entrance of this cave probably weigh three tons."

"You mean they'll leave us here to starve to death?"

"No. We'll take part in the ceremony, you can be sure of that. Even if their religion insists on only one mock king, Karpa-ton will see to it."

Helen trembled against me as the great rough-hewn stone door to our cave opened. Three Argivians entered with trays of food. All of them wore the purple and gold mantles of the religious calling, revived one night every three years. Otherwise, the Argivians were atheists. The food was hot and steaming

and smelled good. The trays were deposited, the savory food awaiting us on the floor. The three Argivians wheeled about and headed for the exit. Then one of them turned and looked me full in the face and said, "I am sorry, Taggart." It was Bonoi, the head bearer.

A straw to grasp at, I thought. Bonoi, who had been reluctant once before and was reluctant again. Bonoi, who had not tasted of civilization the way Gurr of Argiv City had, but who knew the ways of Earthmen nevertheless.

"Wait a minute, Bonoi," I called softly. "Bonoi—"

But the ponderous door rolled shut.

The food was delicious, prepared, it seemed, with great care. The mock king, I thought. Wined and dined and feted and obeyed in small ways—and slaughtered. But we had not been given the mock king's raiment.

Cotten.

I thought of Cotten out there in the big cavern, the treasure cavern. Cotten would not know the meaning of the rite. He would wonder about his strange kingship, and finally accept it. I tried to escape, he would think. These savages respect me. Not the others, but me. They respect me.

And thinking that, he would die. I hated Cotten but at that moment I felt pity for him.

Cotten, the King of the Black Sunrise.

When the great door swung in toward us again, I knew they were ready for us. They said nothing, but merely waited at the entrance to the small cave. Helen looked at me and I nodded, and we stood up and marched outside with them and Dr. Kidder.

I was right about Cotten.

Ignorant of what was to come, the newly-crowned King of the Black Sunrise was seated on his great throne.

Before him, covering the floor of the great cavern, strewn about carelessly as if the Three Gods were not very particular, was the Treasure of the Black Sunrise. It's always been an enigma clear through this end of the galaxy. Do the Argivians really store a treasure for their lost gods? Is it as big as the legends say?

We had the proof before our eyes, and if the Argivians had their way, I thought we were going to die with our knowledge. There were gems in casks and gems on necklaces, glittering, coruscating, alive with prismatic gleam-

ings; there were ingots of gold and coins of gold and casks of gold dust. And there was the rare white twin of gold, platinum. And some of the metal, in tiny phials, glowed coldly. It was radioactive and it might be deadly, and only the secret Priests of the Black Sunrise knew where the Argivians had obtained it.

The Priests—for all the Argivians in the great-vaulted caverns were Priests—had formed an enormous circle around Cotten's throne. They danced there and chanted and I saw that Cotten, a wild smile on his face, was cloaked in a purple and gold mantle finer than all the others. A crown with a single huge blood red ruby was on his head. On his knees at Cotten's feet was a lone Argivian in a robe not of purple but of saffron.

Cotten said, in a distant dreamy voice, "More gold for your king."

The saffron-robed Argivian smiled and waved his hand. Struggling with the weight of three large ingots, half a dozen Argivians deposited them at Cotten's feet, adding them to a pile of gems and precious metal.

Then Cotten saw us as we were thrust into the large

cavern. "You're a fool, Taggart!" he cried. "You're all superstitious fools. These Argivians were looking for someone with guts. I'm their king. Whatever I say, they'll do."

"You don't understand—" I began, but one of the Argivians with us ordered me to be quiet in his native tongue.

"Watch," said Cotten. "You," he addressed the saffron robed Priest. "I want them on their knees. All of them." The Priest, who was also interpreter, shouted his command in the Argivian. At once the whole vast assemblage dropped to its knees, chanting, all the purple robed figures prostrating themselves before Cotten.

He was playing his role to the hilt. For the Argivians he was perfect. He was their King. Their mock-king who would rule them for the brief night of the Black Sunrise, fulfilling the dictates of their religion. But when the first of Argiv's three suns came up, they no longer would have need for their mock-king. This Cotten did not understand. When morning came he would be a votive offering to the three returning gods.

I laughed. I couldn't help it. "You don't believe me?" Cotten cried. "Then watch

again." Foam flecked his lips and his eyes were wild. "Strip three of them," he told the interpreter. "Have them flogged."

Three purple mantled figures were obediently disrobed, fell flat on their faces before Cotten's throne, were whipped there with a rawhide lash until the purple skin of their backs was raw.

"They'll do anything at all for me," Cotten cried. "Anything! The treasure is mine, don't you see? It's mine because I'm their King. They want to give it to me. And I'll tell you why. Do you want to know why, Taggart? Because they believe I'm going to bring the three gods back. They believe only I can do it. Isn't that so?" He nudged the interpreter with his knee.

"Yes, Lord," the Argivian said. Was there the faintest trace of a mocking smile on his lips?

I didn't like Cotten, but he was an Earthman. I had to tell him the truth. I broke away from our captors and cried, "Don't be a fool, Taggart! You're a mock-king. You'll rule them for the night of the Black Sunrise, and then you'll be their sacrifice to the return of their gods."

Cotten laughed. He rocked

forward and almost tumbled from his throne of gold. He finally said, "Still trying, aren't you, Taggart? I'll tell you something. At first I thought I would share the treasure with all of you. We were in this thing together, I told myself. It was only fair. But the world is for the strong, Taggart. And you're weak. Afraid and weak."

Abruptly, his features twisted in a scowl. "And Helen," he said. "Should I share my wealth with Helen? Look at this treasure, all of you. It's mine. Now maybe you know it's mine. But tell me, should I share it with Helen because she preferred a fugitive murderer to me? Should I?"

"You're in no position to share anything," I said, trying to reason with him. "Why do you think I'm telling you this? It's for your own good, Cotten. Maybe there's still a chance if—"

"Shut up," Cotten said coldly. And, to the interpreter, "Shut him up."

The saffron robed figure bowed. "It shall be as you say, Lord."

Two Argivians came for me, herded me back to where Helen and Dr. Kidder were waiting. Suddenly one of them lashed out with his fist,

clubbing me across the jaw. I tumbled over backwards and sat there, wiping the blood from my lips and cursing Cotten.

"Are you all right, Kent?" Helen said.

I looked at her. Something of Cotten's hysteria had reached me. "What the hell does it matter?" I said.

My voice must have carried, for Cotten nodded and repeated, "Sure, what does it matter? I'm not going to share this treasure with you, with any of you. Do you realize how much is here? It will make me the richest man in the galaxy. It's my boldness which cowed the Argivians, you understand? And what's needed, what's needed to make everything certain? One final bold stroke, something which their superstitious minds will eat up. Do you know what that is, Taggart?" He was off the throne now, examining the treasure heaped at his feet. He scooped the gems up and let them run between his fingers, looking molten in the torchlight.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I'm going to give the Argivians their sacrifices. Three sacrifices to their three gods."

"You're mad, Cotten!" Dr. Kidder shouted at him defiantly. For the archaeologist

knew what he meant, and so did I. Helen looked at me and bit her lip and waited for Cotten to speak.

He turned to the saffron-robed Priest and said, "Do you want your gods to return?"

"Yes, Lord."

"For that you will need human sacrifice?"

"So it is written, Lord."

"Then I, your King, give you human sacrifice." He pointed to Helen, Dr. Kidder and me. "These three are your sacrifice," he said.

"Larry, for God's sake," Helen cried.

"It could have been different for you," he told her. "But you wanted it this way, didn't you? I didn't ask you to fling yourself at Taggart." He addressed the saffron-robed interpreter again. "You! Do you understand my command? Are you ready to obey your King?"

"Yes, Lord."

He pointed in our direction again. "Then kill them."

VI

The interpreter shouted something at the purple mantled Priests. A moment later, three of them, armed with gold-hilted, gem-encrusted ceremonial swords, came to-

ward us. What was it Cotten had said? He had cowed them with boldness. In his own case, he was wrong, but I thought, you're an Earthman, Taggart. You're not going to die waiting on your knees for death's sword stroke. I didn't wait for the three executioners. I ran forward to meet them.

The swords were heavy, so heavy that the Priests had to wield them with two hands. I moved swiftly and saw the gleam of one great blade in the torchlight, felt the swift passage of air as the sword swung in a swift arc before my face. Then I was inside the Priest's extended sword arm, grappling with him. I heard Helen scream. I wrenched the sword free and turned around, plunging back toward Helen.

The second Priest stood over her, his own sword raised. Her forearm was up to meet it, as if with that puny defense she could hope to stop the razor-sharp blade. "Stop!" I roared in the Argivian, hoping that one word, shouted peremptorily, could stay the blade long enough. It did more.

The Argivian whirled and faced me, swinging the heavy sword with both hands. I brought my own blade up and

parried his blow, the metal ringing in a strident bell note. I swung again, wildly and fiercely, knowing our lives depended on it. The Priest's head leaped from his shoulders on a quick double fountain of blood. Even in death, his face still looked surprised.

The Argivians were surging forward now, all around us. Their low steady chanting had given way to a babble of confused sound. Far away, I heard Cotten yelling something to his interpreter, but I couldn't make out the words. Helen was looking at the headless thing on the ground and opening her mouth to scream, but no sound came from her throat.

Almost, I had forgotten the third priest. It was only then that Helen was able to scream. I whirled and leaped aside, feeling the blade grate against my ribs. I locked the Priest's extended arm under mine and brought my knee up into his groin. He fell away from me, his sword clattering against the stone ground.

I looked around. There was no place to go. It had been defiance in the face of death, but that was all. Helen cowered against me, burying her face against my shoulder. The Argivians still milled about in confusion, but it wouldn't

last. As soon as Cotten or the saffron-robed interpreter could make himself heard, we were finished.

Helen looked up at me, her eyes misty. "Kent, I—I want you to know—whatever happens—Kent, I love you."

I grinned at her. That was defiance too. I leaned down to kiss her. A kiss—and then swift death.

Just then, an Argivian broke from the crowd and came sprinting toward us. I raised the sword—and let it fall.

It was Bonoi.

"This much I owe you, Earthman," he said. "To your left, as far as you can go. A passage. If you can make it, go. But from this day on you shall never be welcome on Argiv."

He said this, and disappeared quickly into the mob. His life depended on the speed of his disappearance, and he knew it. I turned to Helen and Dr. Kidder. "Come on," I said.

Dr. Kidder bent to pick up one of the ceremonial swords, grunted under its weight and dropped it. Then the three of us ran. Here and there an Argivian tried to stop us, but they were still disorganized. Three of them fell before my

sword, but there was a hot wet wound high on my left arm and I had to drop the weapon because I could not wield it with one hand.

Faces, purple faces swam before us in the crimson torchlight. Then, suddenly, we were clear of them. The dark maw of a passage loomed before us, and we plunged inside, still running. We could not see. We could not think. We could only hope.

The passage turned and twisted and if there were other passages we missed, if we were burrowing deeper into the bowels of Argiv, this we could not know.

All at once the passage opened on another large chamber, where torches were stuck in wall-niches. A figure loomed before us. "I heard Bonoi," he said in the Argivian. "Bonoi has paid for his crime."

It was Karpa-ton.

He swung a wild right fist and I tried to block it with my left hand. It was an automatic gesture, learned in half a hundred brawls across the length of the galaxy. But now, with my left arm hanging limp and useless, it was wasted. I took Karpa-ton's blow flush on my jaw and felt myself falling. I clawed for his legs as I went down, but

his knees blurred up at me and I went over on my back.

Dimly, I was aware of Helen, small and almost delicate next to the giant purple man, trying to wrestle him away from me. He thrust her aside and brushed Dr. Kidder away with his outflung left arm and leaped down at me.

I brought my feet up and heard the air rush from his lungs as they caught him squarely in the chest. "Run!" I called to Helen. "Run while you can!"

Then Karpa-ton and I were rolling over and over and there was no sound, utterly no sound except the noise our bodies made on the rough stone ground, but we both knew without the need to say it that only one of us would get up alive.

Karpa-ton's strong fingers closed on my throat and his face leered at me, inches above my own. I couldn't breathe. There was a distant throbbing in my ears and another sound, closer, Helen's sobbing. I groped blindly with my hands, found something to hold; wrenched. Karpa-ton grunted but held on grimly and there was now a great burning pressure in my chest. I reached up again and got the palms of my hands on his cheeks, pushing.

The fingers tightened on my throat, choking the life from me.

I jabbed at Karpa-ton's eyes with my thumbs.

At first there was nothing, no response, no indication that I had hurt him. But then I felt a wetness on my hands and heard—far away as if he were still in the cavern of the Three Gods — Karpa-ton's scream. He rolled off me and wailed.

And stared sightlessly at me from empty eye-sockets.

"Kill me!" he pleaded in the Argivian. "This way I cannot live."

I stood up and moved away from him. I felt bile gagging in my throat and turned quickly away, thinking he would get his wish because, blinded, he would never find his way from that cavern.

With Helen and Dr. Kidder, I ran.

The passage seemed endless, dark as the Black Sunrise night outside, but not cold, warmed by the fires of Argiv's deep interior. And then, after what seemed hours, the passage began to climb, I felt it in the muscles of my calves. Soon we were struggling upward, panting. If the passage were a maze, a labyrinth. . . .

And then, abruptly, we were outside. It was cold, but not as cold as it had been when we entered the cavern. And low on the horizon, we could see Argiv's green sun returning, the first of its three gods.

We walked for a time in silence and came, suddenly, to the entrance to the great cavern. We stood back in the shadows and watched the Argivians filing out, greeting their returned god.

High up over the entrance, so high that at first we could not tell what they were, were many objects, gleaming white in a long line. When the light grew better, we could see them.

Skulls. Hundreds of them, each adorned with a crown, the single blood-red ruby gleaming on it.

The last Argivian filed from the cavern, bowed to the green sun. With a long stick, he poked something up high over his head, until it caught on an unseen hook. Then he turned and walked down the trail.

Helen turned away, whimpering. What had been placed there along with the long line of skulls was Cotten's still grinning head.

"We could go back inside for the treasure," Dr. Kidder

said as Helen bound the wound on my arm.

"Without knowing when the door will close?" I asked him. "It wouldn't open again for three years."

Dr. Kidder sighed and said, "At least we've seen it. We've done that, and lived."

"Yes," I said. I was thinking of Larry Cotten. I could not help feeling sorry for him. I turned to Helen, "Did you mean what you said inside there?"

"Yes. Oh yes, Kent."

"I can't go back to Earth," I told her. "You know that. Now we can't stay on Argiv either, but if you'll have me. . . ."

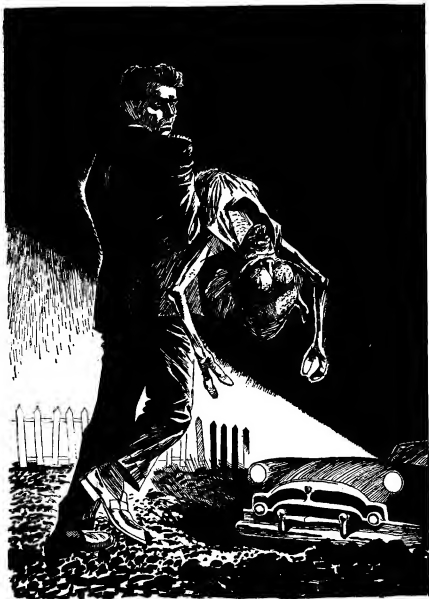
"Kent. Kent, I'll have you."

"Then there's a great big galaxy to see." I winked. We were safe now. The sounds of the Argivians faded down the trail back toward their city. They would know the ways of civilization again by the time they reached it. We could get a second-hand ship with the little money I had, drop Dr. Kidder where he wanted to go, and start seeing the galaxy.

"But listen, Kent," Helen said. "Let's get one thing straight. No more treasures. I—I think I'm cured."

"No," I said devoutly. "No more treasures."

THE END



The body in his arms was that of a visitor from outer space!

By PAUL FAIRMAN

The COSMIC FRAME

A boy, a girl, a sleek-lined convertible and a lonely road. It was the perfect setting for romance—until a weird figure stepped into the glare of the headlights. The dull crunch of splintering bones told the story of one more death on the highway.

But there was a unique kind of problem here: how can there be a case of manslaughter when the victim isn't human?

THE blue light flashed out beyond Pelham Woods. It was seen by several of the boys lounging in front of the barber shop on the main street of Kensington Corners. "Now what in the nation was that?" one of them asked.

"Low lightning. What else?"

"Didn't look like lightning. Held too long. Besides, there's no clouds over there."

"Might be some low ones you can't see for the trees."

Sam Carter, fresh from a late-afternoon shave, came out of the barber shop and said, "What are you fellows arguing about?"



"Just saw a flying saucer."

Sam grinned. "Only one? Nobody's got a right to brag these days unless they see at least six. And they've all got to spout at least five colors."

"This one was blue."

"Always preferred the yellow ones myself." The boys grinned lazily and Sam looked across the street and called, "Lee! Hold up. I'm walking your way."

Lee Hayden, a big, sour-faced man stopped and waited and when Sam Carter came abreast, asked, "What are those no-good loafers jabbering about today?"

"Flying saucers. A blue one this time."

"Uh-huh. Good a way as any to kill valuable time."

"Oh, they're all right, Lee. Say — it looks as though things might be getting serious between our kids."

Lee Hayden snorted. "Darn fool kids. Don't know their own minds. It's a sign of the times."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. My Johnny's pretty serious about life. I've got a hunch Joan will be good for him."

Lee scowled. "Kids these days never have a thought about tomorrow—where the next dollar's coming from. All they think about is getting hitched—making more trou-

ble for themselves—going into debt."

"It always seems to work out, though. Nothing wrong with either of them that marriage won't cure." Sam Carter was one of the few men in Kensington Corners who liked Lee Hayden. Most people resented his sour outlook on life and his money-grubbing instincts. Sam understood the man, however, and this was fortunate for the sake of Johnny and Joan. Sam said, "Looks like their date tonight's a pretty important one. Johnny asked me for the Packard. Doesn't want to propose to his girl, I guess, in that stripped-down hot rod of his."

"They're too young to get married."

"Well, maybe it won't happen for a while," Sam said, easily. "See you later, Lee." Sam turned in at his gate and Lee Hayden went on down the street, scowling as usual.

While, out beyond Pelham Woods, the space ship with the blue exhaust settled on the surface of Nelson's pond and sank from sight.

Sam Carter's phone rang sharply. He awoke and shook the sleep from his eyes. He snapped on the light and not-

ed that it was one-thirty as he picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello — Dad! Are you a wake? Listen to me. Please—"

"Johnny! What in the devil's wrong? You in trouble?"

"Bad trouble, Dad!"

Sam's feet were on the floor. "An accident? Anybody hurt? Damn it, boy! You should have been home a long time ago."

"Don't lecture me, Dad. Just listen!"

Where are you? Tell me about it."

"I took Joan to the dance at Storm Lake and we were on the way home when—"

"When *what*? Talk, boy!"

"We hit—"

"You killed somebody?"

"Yes—well, no—we—"

"For heaven's sake, Johnny! Calm down and tell me. Either you did or you didn't. Don't tell me you ran away from an accident!"

"No—listen, Dad, will you just hang up and get out here as fast as you can? I need help. I need help bad. Just get out here!"

"Okay, son I'll try and make that hot rod of yours go—"

"It's shot, Dad—it won't run. Call Mr. Hayden. Use his car."

"All right. Where are you?"

"I'm calling from a farmhouse on Garner Road — Frank William's place. He's a farmer. You know that back road where—?"

"I know. Where did you have the trouble? Where's the car?"

"At the bend about two miles from Storm Lake. That's where it—it happened. Joan and I'll go back there and wait."

"Stay where you are—we'll pick you up."

"No Dad! I didn't tell these people what happened. We'll wait near the car."

"All right, anything you say. I'll make it as fast as I can."

Ten minutes later, Sam Carter was sitting beside Lee Hayden as the latter pointed his Chevrolet toward Storm Lake. "Damn fool kids!" Lee muttered. "Why didn't you find out what happened? They may have killed somebody. Probably did. The least he could have done was tell you."

"Let's just get there and find out," Sam said with tightness in his voice.

They went into Garner Road from the south end and Lee drove slowly along the ruts and chuckholes. "Why in tarnation did they pick a road like this?"

"It probably looked pretty good to them."

"I wonder how good it looks now?"

"Can't you drive a little faster?"

"And break a spring? I'm doing the best I can."

Sam held his impatience in check until the headlights picked out the rear end of the Packard. It stood squarely in the middle of the road.

"Doesn't look as though there's any damage," Lee said.

"We can't see the front end yet."

Lee pulled up fifty feet back and the two men got out. There was a flash of white and the two young people appeared from some bushes by the roadside. Joan, a pretty little brunette, looked ethereal in her white party dress—out of place in spike-heel pumps on this lonely country road. Johnny Carter's handsome young face was drawn and pale.

"What were you two hiding from?" Lee demanded.

Sam asked, "What's wrong here? There's no other car."

"It wasn't a crackup, Dad. It's around in front. Come on. Joany—you stay here."

"I—I feel a little weak. I'll get into the Chevy."

Johnny helped her in and

closed the door. Then he turned and said, "Come on." As they walked around the Packard, he added, "Now brace yourselves. You're going to see something you never saw before in your lives."

They rounded the car and stood for a moment. Then Johnny snapped on the Packard's headlights and Lee Hayden croaked, "Great God in heaven! Is it real?"

Sam Carter felt a chill run both ways from the center of his spine, freezing his legs and rendering him mute.

Johnny said, "We were driving along and I wasn't negligent—I swear it. Maybe not too alert, but who'd expect anyone—anything—to appear on this road without lights? Anyhow, I saw a flash of it and hit the brakes, but it was too late. I thought it was a man at first and I got out and—and actually picked it up before I realized—" He took an unconscious step backward and rubbed the sleeves of his coat as though they were covered with filth.

Still frozen, Sam Carter tried to find thoughts to describe the horrible thing. It was not more than four feet long and had a head far too large for the thin body. Its skin was green, the shades varying from deep to very

pale. It had thin legs and two spiderlike arms ending in hands with thin delicate fingers and a thumb on either side. Its eyes were lidless and sunk into bony pockets in the round, pale green skull. There was a network of dark veins all over the body and the feet were shapeless pads with neither toes nor heels.

There was a full minute of complete silence. Then Lee Hayden got out a few words. "Is—is it dead?"

"It's dead all right," Johnny said. "When I first came around the car—after I hit it—the big veins were pulsing—you could see its blood—or whatever's in there, moving through. Then they got slower and stopped altogether."

"That blue light the boys saw," Sam muttered. "It *was* a space ship this time."

Lee Hayden, though his face was still filled with loathing, seemed to have recovered somewhat. "This one must have wandered away. Never saw a car before. Didn't know there was any danger."

"Probably attracted by the headlights—held like a moth."

Johnny said, "It's ugly right enough, but it looks kind of pathetic, too—lying there dead. Never knew what hit it."

Sam came out of his shock. "One of us had better go for the sheriff. You go, Johnny. Take the Chevy and drop Joan off at home."

"Okay." The boy turned away.

Lee Hayden had been staring at the hideous thing and a calculating light was now dawning in his eyes. "Wait a minute, Johnny." Lee raised his eyes to Sam Carter. "You realize what this means?"

"I realize that—"

"This is something from outer space, man! An—an extraterrestrial, they call it, that came down to earth in a ship and—and here it is."

Sam was puzzled. "I can see it."

"Right. And you and I—the four of us—are the only ones on earth who know about it."

"Joany doesn't," Johnny said. "I don't think she saw it when we hit it, and after I looked I wouldn't let her go near the front end. I was afraid it would make her sick."

Lee Hayden's eyes glowed. "Good. Smart boy! Then there's just the three of us who know."

Sam Carter frowned at his friend. "What are you driving at, Lee?"

"Just this—there's money

in this thing, Sam! Loads of money! If it's handled right. But we can't go off half-cocked."

"I'm afraid I don't get you—"

"Use your head! If we call the sheriff and everybody finds out, then we've lost it. There'll be photographers and reporters and the knowledge will be public property."

"You mean keep it quiet?" Johnny asked. "Unless we bury it somewhere and forget about it, the public's bound to find out."

"Of course—we want them to. But in the right way. Not until we've thought it over and figured the best way to exploit it. Get what I mean? How would a showman handle this? How would Barnum have done it? Call in the police and give it to the public in exchange for a lot of publicity and no money? Use your heads—both of you!"

Sam said, "No, Lee! We've got no right! This is serious. This may be an invasion of some kind. We've got to be public-spirited and the hell with the money."

Johnny said, "If we knew Russia was going to attack us tomorrow would we have any right to sell the information to Washington?"

"The boy's right, Lee. We

can't fool around with a thing as big as this."

"The hell we can't. This is no invasion and you both know it. It's a chance to make more money than any of us ever saw."

"It's not right, Lee."

"Why not? We aren't going to withhold anything. I say, just take it easy and don't rush into anything with our mouths wide open and spouting information. Twenty-four hours is all we'll need. I'll go to Sioux City and get the thing lined up right. Get a contract with the people who know how to exploit a thing like this if we can't figure out how to do it ourselves."

"But in the meantime, what if—?"

"Twenty-four hours won't make any difference, I tell you! And in that length of time we can arrange a setup to make fortunes. Sam—don't you want the kids to start out life with a real bankroll? Do you want them to struggle along the way you and I had to? In one day, we can set them up for life—and ourselves too—and without hurting a soul. It's your obligation, Sam. Can't you see it?"

Lee Hayden argued on. After a while, Johnny Carter stopped voicing objections

and watched his father, evidently ready to go in either direction Sam decided. The father looked at the son and misinterpreted his manner and expression. He thought, will the boy hold it against me if I deprive him of this opportunity? Do I have a right to deprive him? Possibly Lee is right. Either way, the country will know—the government will be alerted. He turned to Lee Hayden and asked, "How do you think we should go about it?"

Hayden's eyes brightened. "I knew you'd see it my way. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. You and Johnny take the thing home and hide it in your basement. Yours is best because there are only the two of you. I couldn't hide a fly speck in my place that my wife wouldn't find."

"What about Joan?" Johnny asked. "She didn't see this thing but she knows something happened. She'll ask questions."

"You leave my daughter to me. Joan will do as I say—for a while at least. Now, let's get going."

Johnny went back to the Hayden's Chevrolet, turned it laboriously around and headed for home with Joan beside him. Gripping the wheel, he grimly staved off her ques-

tions, stopping them finally, with, "Ask your father when he gets home. He'll tell you about it."

Joan Hayden crouched miserably in her seat. A fine end, this was, to a romantic date.

After the Chevrolet disappeared, Lee Hayden said, "Well, we might as well get it over with. You take the arms—I'll grab the feet here, and we'll drop it in the back seat."

Sam Carter shuddered. "I'll open the trunk. I wouldn't want to drive back with this thing in the seat behind me—even if it is dead." He went back and opened the trunk and returned to lift his share of the burden. There was a loathsome, cold, damp softness to the skin that made him shudder as he gripped the arms. There was little weight, however, and they soon had the monstrosity locked in the trunk.

As Sam drove, quiet and sober, Lee Hayden sat staring ahead, leaning tensely forward, as though already reaching for the money that would soon be his. He said, "Look, Sam—this thing is big—real big."

"You said that before."

"But now I get to thinking and I realize the potential.

The hell with stopping at Sioux City. I'll head straight to Chicago. And we don't have to ring anyone else in on it."

"Better be careful. We don't know anything about exploitation."

"The newspaper men take care of that after they see the thing. They'll give us all the publicity we need. We'll rent a theater in Chicago and do some advertising—"

"They'll laugh at us. They'll think it's a racket."

"Of course they will—until they see it. Until the newspaper men see it. Then we'll have to rent the stadium."

"I hope we don't get into any trouble with the government over this thing."

"How can we?" We aren't violating any law. And who can blame us for trying to make a dollar? When they ask us about it we'll tell them."

"They'll nail us for not reporting an accident," Sam said, smiling weakly.

Lee Hayden laughed and slapped his friend on the shoulder. "Good man! I knew you'd be smart and see it my way. What right have we got to turn down money?"

Johnny was home and waiting when they got there. Sam drove straight into the garage. Johnny said, "I was try-

ing to figure what we'd do with the thing, Dad, so I emptied the deep freeze in the basement. I put everything I could into the refrigerator in the kitchen and just left the rest of the stuff out."

"Good boy," Lee said heartily. "That's using your head. What's a little spoiled food when we're on the cash end of a deal like this?"

They carried the feather-light, green body to the basement under cover of the darkness and laid it to rest in the freezer. Then they went up into the kitchen where Sam made coffee and they sat planning their strategy.

"Don't think we ought to rush into this thing," Lee Hayden said. "We've got to be kind of careful."

This surprised Sam Carter. "How come? You were in such an all-fired hurry—"

"But there's angles. It's practically morning, and if I go kiting off to Chicago after being out all night, the wife's going to start wondering. There'll be rumors all over town. I've got to talk to that girl of mine, too. Keep her quiet until we get this thing rolling."

Lee Hayden had changed. With something to get his teeth into, he'd assumed leadership in an impressive man-

ner. Sam said, "All right. Whatever you say, but I'm still a little nervous about—"

"Now take it easy! I tell you everything's going to be all right. You two get some sleep and I'll give you a ring."

Sam Carter went to bed, but sleep would not come. He lay staring at the ceiling, thinking of the horror that rested in the deep freeze in the basement. The fact that the thing was dead brought little comfort. He had been lying wide-eyed for perhaps an hour, when he heard the noise. He stiffened, strained his ears. The sound came again. No doubt now. From the basement. He got up and clawed for the lamp at his bedside when the door opened. The light snapped on to reveal Johnny's pale, frightened face.

They stared at each other for a long moment. Then Johnny whispered, "Did you hear it, Dad? From downstairs. It—"

"Lee, I'll bet. He couldn't sleep and came back for another look. Let's go see."

"He wouldn't do that. You know what I think? It wasn't dead! The thing was still alive and now it's come to and it's prowling the basement. What are we going to do, Dad? We don't know anything about it.

Maybe it's dangerous—deadly—"

"Now don't get excited. I'm sure it's Lee." Sam picked up the phone and dialed. They waited tensely as another of the rattling sounds came from the basement. Then Lee Hayden's voice. "Hello."

"Lee—Lee, for God's sake. Get over here! There's trouble. The thing's come alive."

Lee Hayden didn't even bother to answer. Sam heard the phone slammed down. He pulled on his pants and had just finished with his shoes when the front gate slammed and there were running footsteps on the walk. They met Lee as he came in the front door. "What's wrong?" he snapped. "What's happened?"

"There's someone down there," Johnny said. "We thought maybe it was you—"

"What would I be doing down there? Why didn't you go find out?"

"Then maybe—maybe the thing came alive."

"And you didn't check? Do you realize what it would cost us if it got away?"

"But it may be dangerous."

"Nonsense, but if it did come to, it's ten times more valuable." Lee was already at the basement door. He went fearlessly down the steps, Sam and Johnny Carter fol-

lowing behind with more caution.

At the foot of the stairs, Lee stopped dead. He pointed. The freezer cover was lifted back. Lee rushed across and looked in. "It's empty," he moaned. "It got away."

He turned toward the open door leading into the backyard. "Come on—we've got to catch it—got to get it back!" He dived out into the darkness. Sam, following, snatched a flashlight off its hook by the door.

In the yard, he bumped hard into Lee Hayden who had stopped suddenly. "The garage," Lee whispered hoarsely. "The side door. It's open!"

Sam flashed the light and the three of them walked softly forward. "Maybe somebody's just trying to steal it," Johnny whispered.

Then Sam snapped on the garage light and no one did any more talking.

There were six of the things present. Two of them were carrying the body from the freezer. The other four carried peculiar tubes in their hands, somewhat smaller than Sam's flashlight. And if the creatures were repulsive when dead, they were bone-chilling when alive and functioning.

Their cold, lidless eyes bored into the three men and Sam muttered, "We're done for!"

The creatures regarded them with no fear whatever. There appeared to be contempt in the leering faces, and the tone of the odd, bird-like chirping with which they apparently communicated with each other, heightened Sam's feeling that they were voicing this same contempt. But something told him they were deadly. Sam breathed, "Don't move! For God's sake, stand where you are! Don't antagonize them!" He had the same feeling he'd have had at facing a den of rattle-snakes; the feeling that one false move would bring out striking fangs.

The creatures seemed to discuss the three among themselves, and Sam was sure the weird squeakings that punctuated the chirpings was their form of laughter. But they made no move to kill, and Sam began to hope they were harmless.

Then he was speedily disabused of the idea. In a concerted move, they turned their small tubes on the front of the Packard. There was no sound, no heat as from a high frequency ray, only the soft sound of metal being bent and twisted by a hand gloved

in velvet. And the three men stared as the front end of the Packard twisted and writhed itself into the same disorder that would have resulted from smashing headlong into a brick wall. Then the truth dawned on Sam—or what appeared to be the truth. "They aren't mad at us. They think the Packard did it; they're punishing the car for killing their comrade. Don't you get it?"

The creature paid no attention to the words. That emboldened Lee. He said "I think you're right. It's incredible! How can they be smart enough to invent and use space ships, and yet not know the car isn't responsible for the killing?"

"I don't know. Shall we back out of here? Make a break for it?"

"I think we'd better stay just as we are," Lee said promptly.

This last proved good advice because, after demolishing the front end of the car to their satisfaction, the creatures squealed and chirped for a while, evidently voicing their satisfaction, and then trooped out into the darkness. As they moved past, each of them leered at the frozen three, squeaked a nerve-wracking farewell, and

the troop was gone, carrying its dead with it.

An explosive sigh from Lee Hayden broke the silence. "I've got a hunch we were damn lucky," he said. "Damn lucky to still be alive."

"How do you think they found the house?" Johnny asked.

Sam said, "I don't know and I don't care. I'm just glad they're gone."

"We've got to do something about this," Lee Hayden said with virtuous indignation. "Alert the police. The village—the whole nation may be in danger. It's up to us to do something about it!"

Sam didn't bother to call Lee's attention to his sudden reversal. It didn't seem important now. The only important thing was to spread the word.

They left the garage and headed for the house. But, halfway up the walk, the sound of an approaching car stopped them. The car pulled up in front of the house and two uniformed men got out.

"It's the State Troopers," Johnny shouted. They must have got wind of it already!"

The Troopers approached swiftly. Lee began, "Officers—" but one of them cut him off.

"We're looking for a Mr. Sam Carter. We got this address and—"

"I'm Mr. Carter," Sam said. "There's something—"

"I'll do the talking. You have a son?"

"Of course. This is my son—John Carter—."

"You have a Packard roadster?"

"Yes."

"Was your son driving it on Garner Road last night? Near the farm of Frank Williams?"

"Why, yes. He took his girl to a dance at Storm Lake and—"

"We know all about that. How do you suppose we traced you down?"

"But why—?"

The Trooper scowled. "Did you think the body would not be found?"

"But you couldn't have—what body—?"

The second trooper snorted in disgust. "Frank William's body. Where a car smashed him into a tree and killed him. From what we can find out, no one used that road last night except your son."

Johnny stepped forward. "You mean Frank Williams was found killed on the road?"

"That's right. Now we may be wrong of course. But the car that hit him will be pretty well smashed up. If you'd let us take a thorough look at your car—"

Sam Carter said, "But this is absurd, officer. There was—there was—"

"Look, all we have to do is check your car. If it's not damaged—"

It dawned on Sam, now, what the green intruders had been up to—what they'd accomplished. They'd killed Williams—set the scene—arranged the colossal frameup. He looked at Lee Hayden and said, "We thought they were mad at the car! We thought—."

The trooper said, "What are you talking about, mister?"

"Well, there was this little green man from Mars or somewhere, and Johnny hit him when—" Sam stopped talking when he saw the look on the trooper's face. Then he knew how foolish it would sound—how utterly unbelievable. He looked back at Lee Hayden and began to laugh. But there was no mirth in the sound. Only fear—and hopelessness.

THE END

THE REVOLVING FAN



THOSE of you who are familiar with fanzines will have to bear with me while I devote some space in this initial column to an explanation of the phenomenon.

Fanzines are, as their name implies, magazines put out by fans. Such professional publications as *Amazing* and *Fantastic* are known as "prozines". The fanzine is addressed to the inveterate s-f fan, and the circulation of each is somewhere in the hundreds. Many are allied in the Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA), through which they distribute.

Over the years, they have developed a special argot: "ish" for "issue"; "illo" for "illustration"; "faned" (rhymes with "Slan head") for "fan editor", to give a few examples. Most fanzines are mimeographed by their editor-publishers with care, patience, considerable effort, and pain to the pocketbook. Almost all who write for the fanzines hope one day to become a prozine writer.

Fanzines are not an exclusively American phenomenon, although, like modern science fiction, they started here. Excellent fanzines are published in Canada, Northern Ireland, England, and Australia.

Some fanzines are models of skill and taste; their editors are interested in furthering science fiction, and perform a notable service in the field. Others develop little cliques which wrangle among themselves, pursue limited aims, and refer to such obscure incidents that, to the objective reader, they remind one of a more-or-less profane family quarrel.

Yet the fanzine is an illustration of what has amazed the

publishing trade: the incredible loyalty and devotion of a hard-core group of fans who buy, sell, collect, write, and talk about their favorite science fiction. We of the prozines owe them thanks—wherefore this column. And now, to work:

GRUE. *Déan A. Grennell, 402 Maple Avenue, Fond Du Lac, Wis. Illustrated. Issued quarterly. Issue #22. Priced at ½ cent per page to the nearest nickel. Price of this issue, 25¢.*

The ubiquitous Mr. Grennell, who appears as a contributor in many of the other fanzines, sets a standard with his own. An excellent, legible offset job, this fanzine takes its contribution to science fiction seriously, but with a twinkle in its eye. In this issue, A. Vincent (or Vinc) Clarke reports the activities of a typical fan in a satire reprinted from the Manchester (England) Convention program—a neat bit of work, followed by Gregg Calkins' American counterpart. There is an enjoyable page of "Gnurrserly Rhymes" devoted to limericks, and a report on the San Francisco Convention by Evelyn Paige Gold. The editor's column is a collection of random thoughts by a keen and offbeat mind. Many pages of letters, some of which may interest you, and a report from Toronto by Howard Lyons. A page of cartoons and illustrations throughout the fanzine give gaiety to its contents. 52 pages.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES. *Fandom House. P.O. Box #2331, Paterson 23, N. J. Issued every fortnight. Vol. 9—#209 10¢ per copy, \$2 per year.*

This is the world's oldest science fiction newspaper, and is characterized by factual reports on events in the field. In this issue, the editors, James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten, list the magazines and books put out during the first half of October, and Harry Altshuler's column retails some news about promags, books, and authors. Lead story, by Jim Harmon, gives details about a proposed s-f magazine, "X Science Fiction", due early in '55 (84 pp., 15¢). A column of Fantasy Forecasts lists the contents of the next issue of F&SF, and the "Letters to the Editor" column contains a biting evaluation

of Sam Moskowitz by FANTASY-TIMES' reviewer, William Blackbeard. A page of advertisements winds up this factual, informative 6-page fanzine.

* * *

SKYHOOK. *Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin Street, N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minn. Issued quarterly. Issue #22. 15¢ per copy.*

In its seventh year of publication, SKYHOOK is highly regarded by fans. The editor-publisher, Redd Boggs, proudly proclaims himself an individualist, and proves it. His subjects range from a political allegory to the eclipse of the sun visible in Minneapolis on June 30th. A six-page department of book reviews by Damon Knight reveals the talent of a bright and sensitive critic. Dean Grennell writes Part II of his discussion of F&SF, its editors (this was before Mr. McComas' resignation was announced), and a personal listing of the best stories published in the promag. A department giving the editor's reaction to eleven fanzines and a letter department complete this excellent 22-page effort.

* * *

LE ZOMBIE. *Bob Tucker, Box 702, Bloomington, Ill. Issued irregularly. Issue #64. 25¢. but no advance subscriptions taken. Sent as long as the supply (225 plus) lasts.*

An excellent offset job with striking, if gruesome, cover, this fanzine is edited and published by a well-known professional writer. Written with tongue-in-cheek, it covers imaginary reports from the Hollywood flackery by Gray Barker, a New Yorker-type page of quotes from the June, 1953 issue of *Galaxy* which shows the magazine in a nude light, and a report of a trip taken by the two Bloomington Bobs, Bloch and Tucker. Dean Grennell (how that man gets around!) has written a history of LE ZOMBIE, and there is a duplication of Mr. Tucker's column, "The Big Bloodshot Eye" which also appears in GRUE. A lengthy but light report on the San Francisco Convention by Bob Bloch, a witty discussion of the difficulties encountered in publishing fanzines in the United Kingdom by Walt Willis, and a page of letters wind up this 38-page job.

PEON: *Charles Lee Riddle, 108 Dunham Street, Norwich, Conn.*
Issued irregularly, but approximately quarterly. Vol. 6—
Number 3, Nov. '51. 10¢ per issue; 12/\$1.

One of the best buys in the field, this 40-page fanzine is published by a fan who spends 5¢ merely to mail it to you. Lead-off is a story, sensitive but somewhat confusing, by Joe L. Hensley, entitled "Second Story". The usual news of fandom; a not-so-usual column of book reviews by Dave Harmon. Harry Harrison writes on "The Death of Science Fiction"; Jim Harmon continues his publicity for "X Science Fiction"; and the weird fringes of published s-f are explored by T. E. Watkins. Dick Clarkson covers fanzines and prozines, and Isaac Asimov defends himself against the critics, revealing an unwarranted supersensitivity. Reviews of eleven fanzines and notes by the editor complete this large, interesting, and literate fanzine, one of the oldest in the field.

* * *

ZIP. *Ted E. White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va.*
Approx. every second month. Issue #6. 10¢ per issue; 3/25¢;
7/50¢.

While this three-color mimeo job is distinguished by many illustrations, its blurred mimeographing makes it difficult to read. It contains stories by Richard Lederer and Lawrence Stark, a satire by Donald O. Cantin, news and views by the editor, an article on s-f collecting by Don Wegars, a poor column of book reviews by Jacob Edwards, and letters from various fans. White is artist as well as editor, and is aided by Fred von Bernewitz and Reeves. This fanzine has not yet hit its stride. 30 pages.

* * *

OOPSLA! *Gregg Calkins, 2817 Eleventh Street, Santa Monica, Calif. Issued approx. every second month. Issue #14, Sept. '54. 15¢.*

OOPSLA! is printed on colored paper and, like PEON, is published by a serviceman. Dean Grennell (how does he *do* it?) is represented by an article on s-f authors' pseudonyms;

Vernon L. McCain gives us his thoughts on fans, fandom, and science fiction; Walt Willis of Belfast reports his impressions of the U.S. in typically witty fashion; and Bob Bloch evaluates his good friend, townsman, and fellow writer, Bob Tucker, in an understandably biased manner. The editor writes the book reviews, edits the letters, and criticizes twelve fanzines. An interesting and light-spirited issue of 26 unnumbered pages.

* * *

CANADIAN FANDOM. *Gerald A. Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ont., Canada. Issued quarterly. Issue #22, Sept. '54. 15¢; 4/50¢; 8/\$1 U.S.*

This is generally conceded to be the best of the Canadian fanzines and shows, in illustrations and mimeo, much care and effort. Contents include Bill Stavdal's defense of "MAD", an unique comic book; a report, by Don Ford, of the Indian Lake Convention; news of fandom by Howard Lyons; a column of record reviews (not so surprising—s-f fans are eclectic); news of the prozines by S.H.M.; a poor story by Leslie A. Crouch; and the usual column of fan letters, followed by a fan profile. Not up to the best of the U.S. fanzines, but a worthwhile effort nevertheless. 26 pages.

* * *

HYPHEN. *Walter A. Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Issued irregularly. Issue #10, Sept. '51. Two issues for 1/6 U.K. or 25¢ U.S.; or two issues will be exchanged for two recent American prozines or books. Illustrated.*

Walt Willis, who appears as a contributor in many American fanzines, is famed in the field for his wit, his skewed sense of humor, and his energy. In this issue, his madness is aided and abetted by two other Belfasters, James White and Bob Shaw, and by two Englishmen, Chuck Harris and Vinc Clarke. Lead-off is a hilarious article by Bill Temple on the vicissitudes experienced by a British s-f fan, followed by articles written by J. Stuart Mackenzie and Dave McIlwain, a story by Bob Shaw, and pages of fan letters. Completely whacky, but with underlying good sense and energy, its humor

gets its point across through poker-faced understatement and/or a sense of the ridiculous. I enjoyed it immensely. So should you. 34 pages.

* * *

Space and time are running out, so I shall briefly review the remaining fanzines received, with a promise to attempt a longer evaluation in the future:

EPITOME. *Mike May, 9428 Hobart St., Dallas, Texas. Monthly. Issue #2. 10¢.*

One of the newest of the fanzines, published by a youngster who makes up in zest what he lacks in attitude. A lengthy, overwritten report on the San Francisco Convention; a poor story by Don Donnell; letters. 21 pages.

* * *

SPACESHIP. *Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 12, N. Y. Quarterly. Issue #26. 10¢.*

An intelligent, thoughtful issue devoted for the most part to reviews and discussion of the latest s-f in fanzines, prozines, and books. 12 pages.

* * *

ETHERLINE. *Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia. American representative: John Hitchcock, 15 Arbutus St., Baltimore 28, Md. Issued every fortnight. Issue #36. 13/\$1. United States.*

A small fanzine devoted mainly to news of our friendly Australian fan groups, and reviews of prozines and books. 22 pages.

* * *

PRE-APA. *P. Howard Lyons, P.O. Box #561, Adelaide P.O., Toronto, Ont., Canada. Quarterly. Issue of Nov., '54. Illustrated. 25¢.*

Profusely illustrated in excellent avant-garde style, the

writing skips from pillar to post. News of fandom, Canada, fanzines. I puzzled out the price as 25¢, in which case this isn't worth it.

* * *

BARSOOMIAN. *James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing 54, N. Y. Issued 3 times per year. Vol. 2—Number 2, Jan.-April, '54. 25¢.*

Mr. Taurasi (see FANTASY-TIMES) here presents a specialized fanzine devoted to the interests of Edgar Rice Burroughs fans. 22 pages.

* * *

In closing, I would like to request all fanzine publishers to send copies of their latest publications to Roger De Soto, care of *Amazing Stories*. See you next issue. . . .

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, and JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION, OF AMAZING STORIES, published bi-monthly at Chicago, Ill., for October 1, 1954.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill.

Editor Howard Browne, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Managing editor, None.

Business manager G. E. Carney, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member must be given.)

Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill.

Ziff-Davis, Inc., 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Estate of William B. Ziff (Beneficial ownership in A. M. Ziff, W. B. Ziff, Jr., S.

Brady, P. R. Stafford, D. M. Ziff, L. M. Ziff) 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

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[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1954.

HERSHEL B. SARBIN, Notary Public.

(My commission expires March 30, 1956.)



Each of the animal's claws was the body of a naked woman!

HOW THE LAND LIES!

By CHARLES FELSTEAD

"An unexplored planet," Bill said, "is the same as a mysterious package. It can hold a treasure or a ticking bomb." And then he broke the string. . . .

KARL finished spraying the neoplast dome of the igloo and switched off the compressor.

"That does it, Bill," he panted, the thin, sharp air of the unfamiliar planet tingling his lungs. "There's our home for the next few months."

Bill opened a valve; and the plastic form within the dome sighed and collapsed. He wrestled it into a pile that glowed warmly in the red light of the twin suns shining through the milky wall. Then he returned outside, shifted the heavy blaster to a more comfortable position on his hip, and stared eagerly toward the black hills.

"Bet we'll be lucky this time, Karl," he said. "It ain't everyday we find an undiscovered planet. I'm going for a walk to get an idea how the land lies."

As Bill strolled away across

the level valley toward the hills, Karl stood watching, and slowly his eyes widened; for Bill went on talking and turning his head occasionally, seemingly in animated conversation with someone who walked beside him. Then his feet left the ground and he started walking upward, as if he were climbing a transparent slope of glass; and all the while he continued gesturing and conversing with an invisible companion.

Karl blinked and rubbed a hand across his eyes. When he looked again, Bill was high above the grassy valley and still climbing the impossible slope. Karl closed his sagging jaw and watched dumbly until Bill had dwindled against the greenish sky and disappeared.

"Hello," a musical voice greeted; and he whirled around, startled.

Standing beside him was a girl like an angel. She was everything he had dreamed about and wanted during all the endless lonely nights in spaceships and on unfriendly worlds.

Hair swept to her shoulders in a red-gold cascade of sheer beauty. Wide-spaced green eyes smiled at him above a warm and generous mouth; and her lips curled up at the corners, as though she understood his longing and were laughing gently at him.

Karl let out his breath, and he realized he had been holding it a long time. He thought of Bill walking away up the invisible slope that did not exist; but his mind became hazy and he could not remember Bill. He knew then that there was no Bill, that Bill had never existed, and that he had been with this girl all the time. They had come here together in the ship; they had been together a long time.

"Shall we leave now, Karl?" Irene asked, and put her warm hand in his. She led him to the ship and they climbed to the control room.

Karl switched on the automatic pilot; and they lay down side by side in the deep cushions of the acceleration couches. The clang of the closing airlock doors rang hol-

lowly through the ship; the take-off warning sounded its strident clangor. Acceleration smashed them into the cushions with crushing pressure.

When the rockets had ceased their thunder and the ship was in free-fall, Karl and Irene propelled their weightless bodies to a port. He held her in the curve of an arm, tenderly aware of the soft sweetness of her body; and they gazed out at the clouds of stars that painted cold fire across the blackness of space.

Karl turned his head to speak to the girl, and she was not there.

He walked in dull confusion across the control room, through the open airlock, and climbed down the ladder to the ground.

He was standing slumped against the ship when Bill came running up, shouting and waving his arms.

Bill grabbed him and jerked him around in a wild dance, yelling like an Indian, until Karl finally dragged him to a halt.

"Cut it out!" Karl growled. "I don't—"

"We hit it, son, we hit it!" Bill yelled, his eyes shining and his broad seamed face red with exertion. "The richest radioactive ore these old eyes ever did see! Acres and

acres of it right on the surface!"

Karl stared listlessly at Bill; but slowly his eyes brightened with enthusiasm. "Oh, man!" he shouted. "Oh, man!" He capered in a dance of his own. "Where'd you find it?"

"Why did you turn back?" Bill asked. "It wasn't more'n half a mile farther. All spread out there, black and beautiful!"

"Me . . . turn back?" Karl sobered, remembering Bill walking up into the air on that impossible slope, busily talking to an invisible companion. He clutched Bill's arm. "Look, you walked off alone, and you—"

"Are you nuts? We walked up the slope to the hills, and all the way we were making plans for prospecting this planet. Then you mumbled something about going back to check the ship and you went off before I could say anything."

Karl drew Bill to a seat on empty packing cases and told him how he had walked away alone, climbing into the air, and about the girl and the space flight that had not been a flight at all.

Bill shook his head slowly. "You're nuts, son. You better

take a couple days rest while I stake out the claim."

Karl gazed thoughtfully at the ground. Finally he said, "You went off empty-handed, Bill. Where did you get the geiger counter?"

"Why . . ." There was a long pause. "That's funny; I didn't have a geiger. Then how'd I know the ore was radioactive? And now I can't seem to remember just where it was . . . it's all getting hazy. . . ."

Karl shivered nervously. "I'm scared, Bill. Something's wrong. Let's pack up and get out of here before. . . Well, I don't know what; but I'm scared."

"And leave the mine?" Bill snorted. "All that wealth? I've never known you to go soft before. You must be off your feed."

"Yeah. Could be. But if things keep acting queer, will you promise you'll go?"

"Sure, sure." Bill rose decisively. "What we need is sleep. Come on, Karl. We'll be okay in the morning."

They unpacked cots in moody preoccupation, made up their beds in the igloo, and turned in without another word. But Karl lay worrying a long time.

The odor of coffee and frying bacon dragged him out of

deep sleep. Red sunlight shining from low down the translucent wall told that it was not long after dawn. The other bed was empty and rumpled. He dressed rapidly and went into the light, yawning and rubbing his eyes.

Karl lowered his hands and stared. The angel with the red-gold hair was holding up a steaming coffee pot.

"Come and get it," she called cheerily.

Karl thought of Bill and the empty cot. He laughed uproariously, knowing that Bill had been only a dream, and that the girl had been sleeping beside him as she always did.

They ate a big breakfast, sitting cozily on a tree-fern log; and he thought that he had never tasted such wonderful food. Irene chatted and laughed; and Karl, glowing with happiness, adored her with his eyes. They sat a long time, talking the nonsense of young people in love.

Finally, she pointed to the city that rose nearby in spires and domes, radiant in shining splendor, and told him that it had been fun camping out but they should go home now.

They sauntered through the lovely city; and everywhere people hailed them cheerily

and stopped to gossip. They visited theaters, museums and great public buildings; and when the setting suns were painting the domes and spires with warm flame, they wandered to a shady park and sat on a bench. Irene snuggled close and he could smell the sweet perfume of her hair. Such happiness swept over him that it was pain, and he closed his eyes. . . .

He was sitting on the tree-fern log before the igloo and Bill was running toward him through the reddish haze of sunset. One sun had retreated behind the mountains; the other sun was splintered on their jagged edge.

"So you didn't believe me, you withered old maverick!" Bill cried. "Well, I went out and found it again—and it's bigger and richer than I even dreamed! We're millionaires — we're multi-multimillionaires!"

Karl looked at him dully. He was tired and very hungry, and sick with fear.

Bill danced around him in a circle, whooping and prancing.

"I surveyed the claim and staked it," he chortled. "Now all we got to do is get a sample of ore and return to base." He stopped gyrating and looked at his empty hands stu-

pidly. "Now, why didn't I think to bring a sample with me?"

"You hate women, don't you?" Karl asked.

"Why—yeah. But I don't see what that—"

"Your wife did a dirty trick on you, and all you want is to get rich so you can go back and show her what a fool she was."

Bill scowled. "Sure. You know the story as well as I do. My wife got tired of being tied to a poor space bum who was always going to strike it rich the next trip. When I was out on the Procyon worlds, and couldn't do nothing about it, she divorced me."

"And married a stupid planetlubber who was loaded with dough," Karl finished.

"What's that got to do with our mine?" Bill stared at him with slow comprehension. "Oh, I get it. You're thinking the way I been thinking all day—how I'm going to walk up to her and say, I'm rich, I'm richer than Croesus, I can buy your husband a thousand times over." He curled his hands into big fists and his face was ugly.

"No," Karl said slowly, "I wasn't thinking about that. All I ever wanted or dreamed about was a girl—a certain

girl—and I only wanted money so I could buy the time to search for her."

"What in Jupiter are you talking about?"

"Please, Bill; let's get out of here! I'm scared stiff, I tell you. If we stay, I know we'll become loonies, or something awful will happen."

"Look, son. I'm losing patience with you. After all these years, we hit it; and you want to run away! I don't see nothing to be scared of; and I ain't going!"

"Please, Bill, let's make a deal. I'll go with you to the mine tomorrow. If there's no mine, will you leave?"

"Sure, sure." Bill grinned patiently. "But there is a mine; and you're the one that's looney."

Karl looked at him sourly. "Let's get something to eat. I don't think I've had any food since—since yesterday."

Bill prattled of the mine through dinner and until they went to bed; but Karl humped on the log, staring silently into the fire with haunted eyes.

When the warm sunlight woke him, Karl glanced nervously at the other cot; but Bill was sprawled on it, snoring contentedly. Karl ran outside, looked around eagerly.

Then he walked slowly to the log and squatted on it, gazing vacantly into space.

So it was a dream . . . but if only he could live in that dream . . . forever. . . .

Karl's shoulders shook; but he jerked his head defiantly and rose to his feet, wiping tears from cheeks that had been withered and dried by many years and the suns of many worlds. He looked sadly at his knarled old hands, turning them slowly to study the callouses earned by endless labor at unprofitable claims.

"Guess dreams is all I got left," he whispered.

He glanced wistfully down the valley toward where his lovely city of yesterday had stood . . . and staggered to his feet. He must have yelled, for Bill came plunging out of the igloo, waving a blaster. Karl pointed a shaking arm at the spires and domes that lifted in glory from the broad valley; and Bill halted, open mouthed, the blaster slipping from nerveless fingers.

Like one man, they ran toward the shining magnificence that beckoned with all its architectural perfection.

As they trotted, gasping in the thin air, the city rose higher before them, its spires reaching toward the green sky; and soon they could see

brilliantly-costumed people walking the streets.

But the city was farther than it had seemed; and their trot fell to a walk. Then they had to sit on a hummock and rest before going on again. And finally they were staggering, tripping over the roughness of the ground. Then they were falling and getting up, stumbling ahead and falling again; but the city was no nearer. The suns were directly overhead; and their red heat soaked the men with sweat.

Bill fell and lay prone, sobbing for breath. Karl squatted beside him.

"'Tain't no use, Bill," he said. "It's just a mirage." He added wildly, "I can't take this no longer! We got to get off this cursed planet!"

They looked up, and there was no city.

It was sunset before they reached camp. They wolfed cold food from containers and collapsed onto their cots.

Karl thought he had just closed his eyes when the crash of a blaster jerked him awake. He grabbed the heavy atomic-pellet gun from its rack and dashed out into night that was brightened by many moons.

A colossal monster was

reared against the sky, towering over Bill and reaching for him with taloned arms.

Bill screamed and fired a bolt that splashed in a mushroom of flame against the monster's belly. He turned and ran; and the creature thundered after him, shaking the ground with the drive of its massive legs.

Karl darted forward, shooting at the head, hoping to hit a vulnerable spot. A pellet exploded with a fierce glare and the jar of concussion made Karl's teeth rattle; but the colossus plunged on.

Karl raced across at an angle and reached Bill's side just as the beast leaned over him. They faced it desperately, triggering their weapons in rapid fire.

Great arms scooped them into a mighty hug.

Karl shrieked with the agony of yard-long talons knifing through his flesh, the horrid mangling of his body against the rock-hard chest. Then death engulfed him in merciful blackness.

They were climbing a steep incline, and Bill was saying, "—hundreds of acres of the stuff lying loose on the surface, just waiting to be scrapped into hoppers. Good old pitchblende, son—juicy, delicious uranium oxide. Nobody

never found a richer deposit! And, partner, it's right over this ridge!"

Karl was still carrying the heavy atomic gun. He swung it around to a more comfortable position.

Bill halted, gaping in horror at the weapon that was pointing at his middle.

"You dirty rat!" he screamed. "Going to kill me so you can keep all the money!"

He yanked out his blaster and fired.

As his body dissolved in flame, Karl writhed in torment; and the torture knotted his muscles. In the instant he hung suspended before death, his finger jerked spasmodically on the trigger and the heavy gun jolted. The concussion of the pellet exploding in Bill's body hurled him into blackness.

The red suns were sliding down the sky, painting the world with rosy warmth. He and Bill were preparing lunch.

"Bill!" he said, and choked.

Bill was staring at him with tormented eyes. "Karl, boy, I thought I killed you!" He sobbed and buried his face in his hands.

"We're leaving, Bill, as fast as we can load our gear. And I pray it's soon enough!"

"Leaving? But the mine!"

"There's no mine . . . and no monster. Don't you know what's happening?"

"No." Bill shook his head in confusion. "I don't get it."

"There's an intelligence here, Bill, that don't want us around to rob its planet. It has been trying to scare us away; but now it's getting serious, and that gun fight was our last warning. Next time it will play for keeps; and you and I will be fertilizer for some nice little flowers."

Bill scratched his whiskered jaw. "I just don't get it."

"All right, listen to this. It got into our minds first with dreams of the things we each

wanted most. Mine was a girl, and you wanted wealth. That was the easy way to get to us, since those were the things we *wanted* to dream. Then, as it learned how, it was able to bring in the monster. But when it realized it couldn't scare us away, it practiced having us kill each other. That was the rehearsal of our deaths. Now that it knows how, next time it will make us really shoot. Don't you get it?"

Bill sat quietly for a long time, mediatively scuffing the dust; then he heaved a tremulous sigh. "So it was a vision, all those hundreds of



"Don't call me a one-arm driver!"

acres of untold wealth. So we go on scrambling from world to world, knocking our brains out for the strike we'll never make. Guess my old lady was right." He rubbed the back of a wrinkled hand across his eyes, and rose to his feet. "Come on," he added. "Let's load her fast. I know down in my bones that you're talking sense."

Karl did not draw a full breath until the shriek of atmosphere against the hull had died away as they escaped into the vacuum of space.

"Ready?" he mumbled; and when Bill wiggled a finger from deep in the cushions of the take-off couch, he slowly raised an arm made leaden by acceleration and flicked the hyperspatial-drive switch.

There was the sickening wrench; then the tremendous weight of acceleration fell away, and the thunder of the rockets snapped off, leaving his ears singing loudly in the utter quiet.

They unstrapped themselves, ate a tasteless meal in morose silence, then wandered back to the control room. Time passed slowly; and Karl retreated into his dream of happiness, reliving again and again the precious hours with his girl of the red-gold hair. It's only the memory of a

dream, he reminded himself.

"It was awful real," Bill said abruptly.

"Huh?"

"I said it was awful real. Why, I even imagined that I took a sample of the ore and put it in that drawer over there. It was earlier in the night the—the monster attacked me."

Bill went to the drawer, pulled it open. "I'll have to look to prove it to myself."

When Karl glanced up, Bill was staring in frozen disbelief at a black lump he held in his hand. Karl scrambled out of the room. He came charging back with a geiger counter. Even as he entered, the clicking in the headphones became a staccato storm.

"Richest radioactive ore of all time," he whispered. Realization came slowly into his face. His eyes burned with misery. "And I didn't plot our course when we left. We've gone perhaps a score of light years! but in what direction?"

There was silence, except for the clicking geiger.

Karl raised his eyes, but Bill was not there.

He stared wildly about the empty room; then ran blundering and screaming through the ship. . . .

He was alone.

THE END

The Siren from Cnossus

By BEDELL STUART

They don't come more gullible than Stan Purcell. He believed anything—even that there existed a photograph of the fabled Minotaur from ancient Crete. But when a girl who claimed to be three thousand years old wanted to marry him— Look, just how naive can you expect a man to be?

DIRECTOR Hawley Hatton of the Museum of Natural History banged his fist down in a very un-erudite fashion on the top of his desk (Burma teakwood, circa 17th Century).

"Purcell," he bellowed, "you're fired."

Stan Purcell, an archaeolo-

gist specializing in the Minoan civilization at Cnossus, Crete, knew he couldn't exactly put a Situation Wanted ad in the newspaper and expect the world to beat a path to his doorstep. "What for?" he asked, hoping his voice showed the proper mixture of naiveté and chagrin.





She lay submerged in bubbles—a glowing, vibrant vision of beauty!

"For lying."

"I didn't lie."

"Purcell," Dr. Hawley Hatton said coldly, "you wired us from Cnossus. You wired us again from Rome, enthusiastically. And again from Bermuda. What did you stop off at Bermuda for, anyhow?"

"To soak up some sun."

"But you just came from the Mediterranean."

"Where I was working."

"That's what you say. Shall I show you your cable?"

"I know what it said."

But Hatton reached into a drawer of his desk and came up with a sheet of crumpled yellow paper. Stan read over the director's shoulder. It was the first wire he had sent, from Crete.

I'VE FOUND THE MOST AMAZING DISCOVERY IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHEOLOGY SINCE SCHLIEMANN DISCOVERED TROY STOP IT'S A FULL COLOR PICTURE OF THE MINOTAUR, THAT FABULOUS CRETAN MONSTER, HALF MAN, HALF BULL STOP IT'S NOT A FRIEZE, CHIEF STOP IT'S A PHOTOGRAPH EXCLAMATION POINT.

"That's right," Stan said, "a life-size photograph, in color, of the Minotaur and a beautiful Cretan girl."

"Where is it?"

"I sent it air express. You know that."

"I believed you, Purcell. We called the press, the wire services, the TV people. This was going to be the most important thing that ever happened to the Museum of Natural History. So, what happened?"

"I don't know," Stan admitted. "I just got off the plane from Bermuda and received a message to come right here."

"You're fired. When we opened the air express package, we found nothing but an empty frame."

"What?" Stan gasped.

"I should have realized it was a lie," Hatton said bitterly. "How could they have made a photograph of the Minotaur—assuming the Minotaur ever existed—over three thousand years ago?"

"You never know what to expect in Crete. They had plumbing as good as our twentieth century variety while the rest of the world went on using a nearby stream and a lit-trench for another few thousand years. Their women wore flouncy skirts and plunging neckline blouses with puffed sleeves while the Egyptians were walking around in loin aprons, and five hundred years before the Greeks invented the toga. Why couldn't

they have discovered photography, too?"

"Where's the picture?"

Stan shrugged. "It must have been stolen."

"Stolen? There's no cut-throat competition in the museum business, Purcell. I say you were lying to cover the fact you were vacationing in Crete. Or else this is the worst practical joke ever perpetrated. You're through here, Purcell. If I were ten years younger, I'd punch you in the nose."

When Dr. Hatton said nothing more, a thoroughly bewildered Stan Purcell turned around and left the museum office.

"It's me, Nancy," Stan said two hours later. "I'm back from Crete."

A slim, beautiful blonde with a delicate, almost fragile figure, Nancy Vernon looked at Stan coldly. "Do you want a medal or something? You've made me a laughing stock among all my friends. And Dad won't even speak to you."

"If it's about the photograph—"

"Certainly it's about the photograph." Nancy turned away angrily and did something with her hands. When she faced Stan again, she

handed him a small engagement ring with a modest, half-carat stone. "This is about the photograph, too," she said.

"But—"

"You know Dad wanted you to come into the construction business with him. He offered you a vice-presidency, after we were married. 'If a man can tear down ancient cities,' he said, 'he can also build new ones. There's a place for you in our organization, Stan. The Vernon Construction Company opens its arms to you.' But no. Oh, no. You had to go galavanting off to Sicily—"

"Crete."

"To Crete. At least if you had *done* something there. You're nothing but a big overgrown practical joker with an archaeologist's pick and shovel."

"I really found that photograph, Nancy."

"Oh, sure. And it got up and walked away. I was so proud of you, Stan. I even made Dad feel proud. All my friends were there at the museum when Dr. Hatton had the press and the TV reporters on hand for the great occasion."

"You saw it?" Stan asked eagerly. Later, the shock of his broken engagement would hit him. Right now he could think of nothing but the ancient Cretan photograph he

had unearthed beneath the ruins of the palace at Cnosus.

"I saw an old-looking—and empty—picture frame. *Time* Magazine gave it three lines, calling it the biggest farce since Cook claimed he discovered the South Pole, or since the *Literary Digest* said Landon would win. All my friends are laughing at me. Dad doesn't want me to speak to you ever again, unless you agree immediately to give up this—this digging—business of yours."

"Then it's not because the picture disappeared. It's because your father wants me to go into construction with him."

"Yes," Nancy said, reaching out hopefully for the engagement ring. "If it really was a practical joke and you're ready to quit this strange profession of yours, Dad is willing to have you as a son-in-law. After you're a vice-president of Vernon Construction, I don't care what my friends think. Don't you see, Stan? Don't you?"

Stan nodded. "I see, all right," he said bitterly. "You'd never be happy, married to an archaeologist. This business of the photograph was just a pretext."

"Stan, how can you say that?"

"I didn't say it. You did."

"Stan, please. You don't understand."

"I do understand. Unfortunately. If the photograph hadn't disappeared, I'd have been famous in my field. It would have satisfied your friends and maybe for a few weeks they'd have offered toasts to me all over the night spots of New York. But it wouldn't have satisfied your old man—"

"Stan, don't call Daddy that awful name."

"—and it wouldn't have satisfied you, either."

"But you're all wrong!"

"Am I? I tell you what, I'm going to find that picture. Then we'll see." Stan did not have the slightest idea of how he would go about finding the missing photograph of the Minotaur and the beautiful Cretan woman, the photograph which could not possibly exist because the shutter of the unknown camera had opened on it over three thousand years ago, but the photograph which Stan had seen with his own archaeology-trained eyes and had recognized, fantastically, as authentic. At the museum he was now *persona non grata*, so he could expect no help there.

"Stan, Dad says this is your last chance."

"I'm sorry, Nancy. Maybe it will work out for us and maybe it won't. But I'm going to find that picture."

The massive silhouette of the museum was a dark fortress crouching against the starry night on Central Park West. Stan's pulses quickened as he neared it. For others, the museum with its musty, echoing corridors was a sepulchre for dead ages, for the accumulated dust of centuries. But for Stan it was a place alive with wonderful memories, a vault which did not resurrect the memory of past ages but rather maintained them as living things.

And now, he was no longer a part of this world in which years, centuries and millenia could be flipped through like the pages of a daily calendar. A burp rumbled ominously in his throat and escaped. He had spent the hours of twilight in a series of bars on Fifty-second Street, fortifying his courage with distillations from the French grape vines, the Kentucky corn fields, the Scotch barley acreages.

There was a sleepy old watchman named Sam Sawyer who guarded the museum

at night. There were three or four other watchmen whose names Stan did not know. And there was the late show at the adjacent planetarium to be reckoned with. Stan munched on a chlorophyl tablet and hoped it would obscure the odor of the various brews. The late show at the planetarium was an important feature of his plan. For Sam Sawyer, Stan knew, was passionately interested in astronomy. He often opened the door leading from the planetarium to the museum so he could watch part of the sky show. With all the other entrances locked, this could be Stan's means of ingress to the museum.

Stan paid his admission fee at the planetarium window and walked inside. Several people were gazing at the exhibits in the rotunda and others were making a circuit of the planetarium corridor with its meteorites, photographs and scales telling you how much you would weigh on the various planets. Stan joined them, walking by the picture of Aphrodite springing from the foam of the Aegean Sea. When he reached the entrance to the museum, the door was locked.

Stan sighed. Perhaps this was old Sam Sawyer's night to catch up on his sleep. Stan

lurked in the shadows near the door and began to feel like a fugitive. The odds were against Sawyer coming, he told himself. The old man wouldn't breach the museum regulations every night. The various distillations had fortified Stan's courage, all right—but, he thought, they had befogged his reason.

And then, all at once, the door to the museum opened. Stan flattened himself against the wall, waiting while Sam Sawyer's grizzled head appeared. Sawyer had a mouse-eating smile on his face as he walked out into the corridor of the planetarium. The door clicked shut softly behind him as he made his way across the floor toward the sky show auditorium.

Walking toward the door, Stan felt as if unknown eyes were watching him. Was he breaking and entering? No, he decided, just entering—for Sam Sawyer had unlatched the door and left it unlatched because it was supposed to remain locked at all times after the museum closed and Sawyer probably did not have the key.

Equipped with a three-battery flashlight, Stan took a deep breath and entered the deserted museum.

Beyond the Hall of Reptiles on the fourth floor was the new Minoan Room, devoted to artifacts from the Cretan culture which, with its capital at the island city of Cnossus, had covered the Mediterranean world and left the imprint of its culture there almost a thousand years before Homer's heroes had gone off to sack Troy, almost two thousand years before Caesar had divided Gaul into four parts and almost three thousand years before Columbus had discovered America.

It was here, Stan reasoned, that Hawley Hatton had planned to unveil the photograph to the press. As he reached the entrance to the Minoan Room, though, Stan received the first of many surprises. A new unfinished door of raw pine planking barred his entrance to the room. A sign stenciled on the door in black paint said **KEEP OUT—THIS ROOM CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC.**

A small padlock which might give people the impression that the sign meant what it said but couldn't be expected to withstand much of an onslaught was in place at one edge of the door. Stan turned the flashlight over in his hand and began to whack the padlock with it. After a while, the

metal staple which held the lock in place came loose from the soft, now splintered pine.

Stan looked furtively over his shoulder, as if he expected someone to be watching him. He smiled triumphantly, though, not because Hawley Hatton's door had failed to keep him out but because the director had bothered to put up a door. It means, Stan thought, that Hatton wasn't really sure if Stan had played a monstrous practical joke, that somewhere in Hatton's unimaginative mind there was room for the thought that Stan had brought the impossible photograph back from Cnossus and something equally impossible—the fact that it had vanished—had happened.

Still smiling, Stan pushed into the dark Minoan Room, the flashlight's beam probing ahead of him through the blackness. "Shut that damned thing off!" a woman's voice cried. "Do you want the Minotaur to find me?"

In his haste to swing its beam in a wide circle about the large room, Stan almost dropped the flashlight. Where was the voice coming from? It seemed to be close at hand and certainly not mechanically reproduced, but what were the odds against finding a woman

with a voice tangy and sweet as ancient wine stored in terra cotta jugs lurking in the dark halls of an early Minoan room at a museum?

"Where are you?" Stan said.

His answer was in the form of two slim bronzed hands floating into the beam of the flashlight, and a moment later—but briefly—a face.

Stan dropped the flashlight.

He could make no mistake about that face. He had seen it only once before and had marveled at its beauty. It was the face of the girl being chased by the Minotaur in ancient Crete.

"That's better," the girl said in the darkness, speaking perfect English. "That's a heck of a lot better." Speaking perfect American-style English, Stan corrected himself.

"But I thought you were part of a photograph!"

"Please! Can't you whisper? The Minotaur has been chasing me motionlessly for over three thousand years and now that we both can move he *really* wants to catch me."

"I'm sorry. I'll whisper. I want to know how it is you were a photograph once but now—"

"Photograph? I don't even know what that means. I was

mummified alive, if that's what you mean. I and the Minotaur."

"Mummified?"

"Sure. The Egyptians copied it from us but weren't very good at it. They were only able to mummify dead people, and what's so hot about doing that?"

"Nothing's so hot about it, I guess."

"O. K. You agree with me. In that case—"

"Exactly what do you mean by mummified?"

"Frozen, I guess you'd say. Two-dimensionalized with our metabolism slowed almost to a standstill."

"But why?"

The voice like wine tinkled with laughter. "Why did your people bury a time capsule at your Worlds Fair fifteen years ago so future generations could find it? Why do men keep records of their times? Why—but I don't have to go on."

It was a joke, Stan decided. Hatton, knowing he would sneak into the museum, getting back at him this way? Nancy's father, perhaps? Stan figured he'd better nip the joke in the bud before its implications drove him back to Fifty-second Street and another round of the bars there.

"If you're an ancient Cretan girl—"

"A Minoan Princess, if you please!"

"All right, a princess. If you're who you claim, how come you speak such good English? How come you can speak English at all?"

"Are you kidding? Try being frozen in a picture for over three thousand years, with no new facts to stimulate your memory. Then, all of a sudden, you're free again. Your memory is so rested, it remembers everything that happens around it. I mean everything. The words spoken by people on the way over here, the meaning of the words by the actions and gestures they made, more words in the museum before the picture unfroze . . . I probably know English better than you do."

"Can you prove your identity?"

"Prove it? Do I have to?"

"I'm an archaeologist and I saw you in the picture, but I don't believe you. Others would believe you even less."

"Believe me? Who cares if they believe me or not? Maybe you don't get it, friend, but I've gone over three thousand years without a good drink of wine, three thousand years without a roasted boar steak,

three thousand years without exercise, three thousand years without a man. Who cares if they believe me or not?"

"But you . . . I . . . we . . ."

Abruptly, Stan stopped talking. In the darkness, smooth rounded arms enfolded about his neck. A breath of exotic perfume titilated his nostrils. Lips warm and avid pressed against his own. There was a deep sigh, more pressure, a delightful winey taste. His pulses racing, Stan responded, then withdrew in the darkness.

"I see men still remember how to kiss in the Twentieth Century," the voice said after another long sigh.

"I—I didn't know you Minotans knew about kissing."

"We had plumbing, didn't we?" She spoke as if that explained everything. "We knew about kissing and all sorts of delightful things. Here, I'll show you."

"Wait a minute. Stop." The hands had touched him again. "What about the Minotaur?"

"By the sun goddess, I forgot!" the voice said, then added: "He's after me, you know."

"You already said that. Is he really half man, half bull?"

There was a tittering laugh in the darkness. "I'm surprised at you, Stan Purcell.

That is your name, isn't it? I heard them all talking about you. Of course he's not half man and half bull. The bull part is just a mask he wears, but I don't like him."

"You don't like him?"

"Nope. He was a devoté of the bull god. Papa wanted me to marry him, and so did my brother Tecko, because if I married a devoté of the bull god I couldn't very well be the heir to the sun goddess throne, could I?"

"I guess not," said Stan.

"Of course not. But I wouldn't marry any old Minotaur. So when the frozen picture had to be made and buried in the palace wall at Cnossos, that crummy kid brother of mine decided if I got frozen in it he'd be heir to our father's throne, not me. Just for spite, he froze the Minotaur in, too. And here we are."

"Here *you* are," Stan said, not knowing what to believe. "I don't see any Minotaur."

"You don't see me, either, because it's dark. But believe me, the Minotaur is around."

"What does he want to do with you?"

The girl's laughter was grim this time. "He had a crush on me three thousand years ago. He's been carrying a torch three thousand years.

You go ahead and figure it out."

"Oh."

"We can outfox him, though."

"How?"

"Take me home to live with you. He's afraid to leave the museum, you see. Me, though, I guess I'm just uninhibited."

"You can say that again," Stan told her, remembering the kiss.

"Well then, come on. Hey, what was that?"

Stan heard it too, a sound in the darkness, as if one of the Minoan Room exhibits had been disturbed, accidentally or otherwise. This was followed by the shattering noise of broken crockery and a loud exclamation in a language Stan didn't understand.

Then a bass voice called:

"I'm coming, Teusa!"

And Teusa—for such was the Minoan Princess' name, Stan discovered—cried, "You keep away from me. I've got protection, now. Stan Purcell will kick your teeth in if you come near me."

There was a laugh and then the sound of muffled footfalls across the stone floor of the Minoan Room. Stan crouched quickly and groped for the flashlight. He found it, pressed the button, swung the beam of

light upward—and saw a well-muscled man, his skin a gleaming bronze and covered by nothing more than a loin apron despite all the fancy clothing the Cretans were known to have, sprinting toward him.

Upon the man's shoulders and completely obscuring his neck if he had any was the hideous face of a hairy, strangely pop-eyed bull.

The apparition pounded down upon Stan like a runaway locomotive. He barely had time to raise his hands in defense. He was so awed by the face of the creature that instead of using his flashlight as a club he continued to shine it so he could study the thing. A balled fist blurred across the beam of light and into darkness for an instant before something exploded against the side of Stan's jaw. He went down in a heap, squatting over a pair of rubbery legs which were, he soon realized, his own.

"Hit him back!" Teusa screamed.

Stan stood up groggily. He had dropped the flashlight again and now waited in darkness, his fists raised in front of his chest, for the Minotaur.

"Man or beast," Stan said, still a little drunk and wondering if the ancient Minoans

employed oaths and challenges as the later Romans did, "I'm ready for you!"

There was a rush of sound. Stan swung his right fist in a wild haymaker and K. O.'d nothing but air. He jabbed with his left and heard Teusa yelp.

Then something struck his stomach, below his cocked fists, driving all the wind from his lungs as effectively as a sledge hammer. Stan knew, without looking, that it was the great horned shaggy head of the Minotaur.

He collapsed, clutching his stomach. He heard Teusa's quick bare footfalls as she plunged from the Minoan Room with the Minotaur in pursuit.

Teusa's voice faded down the hallway. "I'll see you again, Stan Purcell. I *want* to see you again."

Even when she shouted, the voice was still sweet and tangy as wine. But the high shrill sound of it would bring Sam Sawyer from the planetarium or one of the other guards. Stan struggled to his feet, trying to gulp air into his temporarily paralyzed lungs. He made it on the third try and staggered from the Minoan Room, forgetting his flashlight.

Leather-shod feet pounded

in the corridor. It wasn't Teusa. It wasn't the Minotaur. They had seemed to be bare-foot.

"Who's that?" a reedy voice called. Sam Sawyer's voice.

Stan lunged to the left down a branching corridor which took him by the Ice Age exhibit. He could hear Sam Sawyer tearing down the hall after him. If he were caught they would blame him not only for the phony picture, but also for whatever the Minotaur had broken in the Minoan Room. He'd be blackballed from the field of archaeology. He ran on.

And tripped over something, crashing into a display of semi-precious stones which was barely visible in the moonlight streaming in through the high windows of the Mineralogy Room, which was adjacent to the Ice Age exhibit.

The display case shattered, peppering Stan, the floor and the walls with flying glass.

Sam Sawyer bellowed and charged into the Mineralogy Room. Stan watched a flashlight beam cut a swath through faint moonlight toward him.

"I know you're in here!" Sam Sawyer cried.

Stan scooped up a handful

of the semi-precious stones which were strewn about the floor on all sides of him. He propped himself up on one elbow and hurled the gems across the room, hearing them fall with a sound like sleet on a tin roof.

Sam Sawyer yelped and galloped in pursuit of the noise. Waiting until he thought the watchman was on the far side of the Mineralogy Room, Stan climbed to his feet and streaked for the exit.

The sound of his own feet drumming on the corridor floor was very loud. The sound of Sam Sawyer's voice as the watchman came after him was louder, but he kept ahead of the old man and rushed down the stairs to the main floor of the museum. Moments later, he rushed through the doorway to the planetarium and joined the crowd which was just filing out of the sky-show auditorium.

A panting Sam Sawyer came up to them, peering intently at the scores of faces. Stan was sure he hadn't been recognized in the darkness of the museum. Perhaps the watchman was looking for a guilty expression.

"Evening, Sam," Stan said. "What are you doing out here in the planetarium?"

"Chasing an intruder, and

that's the truth, Mr. Purcell," Sam Sawyer said.

"Well, let's hope you catch him."

It was quiet under the big trees in the planetarium park. Stan wondered if Teusa and the Minotaur were out here—somewhere on the streets of New York—too.

"I see you're back from the Riviera," said Mrs. Peabody, Stan's landlady.

"From Crete, you mean."

"Crete, Shmeet. It's all the same to me. I knew you were coming back because you already have a visitor."

"Is that so?" Stan said, wondering who it could be.

"Waiting in your room now. Stan Purcell, you're lucky to have a broad-minded landlady like Bertha Peabody, you are. Other landladies would be packing your bags and leaving them outside on the doorstep, they would. But—" and Bertha Peabody giggled, her plump triple chin wagging "—when I was younger I used to go for the college professor type too, with horned-rim glasses and all. Well, good night, Mr. Purcell." And the widow Peabody shut the door to her room behind her.

The visitor, Stan concluded quite naturally, was a woman.

Nancy? Visiting him at this late hour to try to patch things up between them? Suddenly, Stan wasn't sure that he wanted things patched up with Nancy. She would never be happy married to an archaeologist. He would never be happy at any other job but archaeology.

No, that wasn't the reason. He'd gone through all that before and come up with no answer except that he thought he was in love with Nancy and you couldn't pick your mate on the basis of what profession she did or did not like.

It was Teusa. He was thinking of Teusa, the self-styled Minoan Princess. With her tawny skin and fluffy red-brown hair she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He would never forget the way she had depended on him to be her champion against the Minotaur.

Stan climbed the two flights of stairs to his small furnished apartment. "Nancy?" he called when he opened the door. He waited for an answer, not knowing what he would say to her.

The convertible living room was dark, as was the kitchenette, but a light was coming through the partially ajar bathroom door.

"I'm in here, Stan," a voice

said. It wasn't Nancy. It was Teusa.

Stan heard the sound of water sloshing in the tub, and gay singing in Teusa's alien language. The ancient Minoan tongue, Stan remembered, had never been deciphered, for no equivalent of a Rosetta stone had ever been found for it.

"Are you decent?" Stan asked automatically.

"Of course I'm decent. At least, I think I'm decent. I hope you think I'm decent and then some."

Stan opened the door—and wished he hadn't while at the same time he was glad he had.

Teusa was taking a bath. Teusa's Cretan skirt and blouse were folded neatly on the cover of the closed commode. Teusa had worked up a frothy lather in the bathtub and was busy sloshing around in it with a happy look on her face. Now a bronzed leg would appear above the foam and now an arm and now a sleek, suds-covered view of other parts of Teusa's anatomy.

Stan gaped and went on gaping until Teusa said, "What's the matter, am I doing it wrong? I figured that's what this tub was for, although back on Crete we cleaned ourselves by rubbing on olive oil three or four times

a year and scraping it off with sand. If I'm doing it wrong, will you please come here and show me the right way?"

"I assure you, you're doing it right!" Stan bleated.

"Then what are you getting so upset about? Calm down, will you? Incidentally, when you're all finished, do you just hop out dripping wet or shake yourself dry or use some kind of cloth, or what?"

"Teusa, you don't understand—" Stan began.

"I know. I'll bet you're upset because you're worrying about the Minotaur." Teusa lifted a golden leg from the water and began to soap it with Stan's washcloth. "Last I saw of him, he was being chased by the police for indecent exposure or something like that. It sure is confusing, though. If it's warm enough outside just to be wearing a loin apron like the Minotaur was, what's all the fuss about?"

"It has nothing to do with the temperature."

"Well, never mind. Your police will never hold the Minotaur, anyway. You know what he was yelling when they took him away?"

Stan said he did not.

"He vowed he was going back to the museum as soon as he escaped. He vowed he was

going to get a Cretan double-ax from the Minoan Room and find you and cut your head off with one swipe of it."

"What's he got against me?"

Teusa grinned as she lathered up her neck and shoulders and other things. "Why, I told him how we felt about each other."

"You did what?" Stan asked. "I never said I felt one way or the other about you."

"You didn't wake me up after three thousand years just for nothing. Do you Americans believe in Destiny? We Minoans do. It was my Destiny for you alone to find me."

Since Stan had already done the finding, he couldn't very well argue with that. As Teusa began to sit up in the tub, he quickly went to the rack and took down a large bath towel, tossing it to her. Teusa climbed from the tub with the towel draped like a tent from her shoulders. She watched with fascination as a little whirlpool formed in the tub after Stan activated the mechanical stopper.

"It sure is more fun than an oil and sand bath," Teusa admitted. She rubbed her stomach under the towel. "Well, do we eat or don't we?"

"All right, we eat. But after

that, you're getting out of here."

"I have no place to go. You can't just put me out on the street, can you?"

It was a good point, Stan realized. He tried to imagine what it would be like if he suddenly found himself thrust three thousand years into the future. Whoever would put him out, homeless and bewildered, in whatever passed for a street then just wouldn't be a worthy member of the human race. On the other hand . . .

Teusa took the towel from her shoulder and folded it across the rack. She was all rose and copper loveliness and, gulping, Stan turned his back, groped for the skirt and blouse on the commode and handed them to her without looking.

"Get dressed" he said. "We'll find a good restaurant."

"Sure, it was a good meal," Teusa said two hours later. "But you should try boar steak sometime."

"It's very late," Stan told her as they entered the apartment. "You can use the bed, Teusa. I'll sleep on the floor."

"But the bed is big enough for both of us."

"Don't tempt me," Stan pleaded.

"Why shouldn't I tempt you?" Teusa asked him naively.

"If you want to stay here, sleep in the bed and I'll sleep on the floor and don't ask questions like that. We'll figure out what to do with you in the morning."

Teusa shrugged, gave him a playful kiss, then an unplayful one, chucked her skirt and blouse in the darkness, watched Stan convert the hide-a-bed, then bounced happily on it. "Wow!" she cried. "If the guys back at Cnossus could see me now! This is some bed."

And some Teusa, Stan thought as he spread a blanket on the floor for himself. First he couldn't sleep because every few minutes Teusa would giggle, bounce on the foam rubber mattress and squeal, "This is some bed." Then he couldn't sleep because Teusa was there, scant feet from him, breathing regularly, sleeping like a baby and he remembered how beautiful she was and knew at the same time he was at a loss as to what he could do with her. And then he couldn't sleep because the floor was hard and his back began to ache.

The doorbell awoke him just after he had drifted off to sleep an hour or two after

sunrise. At first he forgot where he was. He tried to bolt off the bed and found he was on the floor and staggered across it toward the door. On his way, he noticed that Teusa wasn't on the bed. The bathroom door was closed, so he assumed Teusa was in there. Whoever had come to the door, he hoped Teusa would stay out of sight.

He opened the door and blurted, "Nancy!"

She stood there, trim and blonde, with an armload of groceries.

"I figured a bachelor would love his breakfast served to him on his second day home from Crete."

"I—I've already eaten," Stan said.

Nancy stopped smiling. "At seven o'clock in the morning?"

"Well, you see—"

"Stan, I've come to make up with you, but if that's your attitude I'll go right on home and never bother you again."

"That's not my attitude. I don't know. I'm tired. I didn't sleep well. Come in if you want to."

"If I want to?"

"Please come in, Nancy. By all means, come in."

Nancy pecked at his cheek with cool dry lips and deposited the groceries on the coffee table in the living room. She

was about to head for the kitchenette when the bathroom door opened and Teusa said, "Who's the yellow-haired girl, your slave or something?"

Teusa was already wearing her skirt but was just slipping the puff-sleeved Cretan blouse over her head. "If you had told me sooner you had a girl slave, Stan," she said brightly, "I could have had her bathe me. She's not bad looking. Did you get her from the Northland? That's where all blonde people come from, the Northland."

"Stan Purcell," gasped Nancy, who had taken considerable time to catch her breath, "you—you philanderer!"

"I can explain everything!" wailed Stan. "At least, I can try."

"It's quite clear," Nancy told him frostily, "that you don't have to explain anything to me."

"She sure is a cocky slave," said Teusa. "Why don't you beat her?"

Squawking and stammering, Nancy fled.

"I'd sell her if I were you," Teusa said after Nancy had slammed the door behind her.

If he answered, Stan suspected, he would start yelling. Instead, he turned on the

radio—which amazed and fascinated Teusa—and began to putter around with the groceries Nancy had left on the coffee table. On the radio, the seven o'clock news commentator was saying: "And this item from New York. A man whom the police regard as a potentially dangerous lunatic escaped early this morning from the detention cell of the Forty-first Precinct. Booked for indecent exposure and disturbing the peace, the man had been arrested last night a few blocks from the Museum of Natural History. He gave his name as Mino Taur and his address as Street of the Bull Baiter, Cnossus, Crete. When last seen he was wearing only a strange garment which barely covered his upper legs and carrying the huge hairy mask of a bull. Police suspect this man to be violent. And now, for our sponsor . . ."

"He escaped," Stan said.

"I heard. But how did the little box know?"

"Never mind. Do you think he'll come here?"

"I know he will, if he can find out at the museum where you live. I'm not worried, though. You'll protect me."

"*I'll protect you?*" Stan cried. "But who's going to protect—never mind." Sud-

denly, he found it very flattering to be cast in the role of Teusa's champion. And surely the Minotaur wouldn't come after him brandishing a Cretan double-ax and bent on mayhem . . .

Or would he?

While Teusa listened with mounting excitement to the magic of the radio, Stan waited until nine o'clock and then called Dr. Hawley Hatton at the museum. "This is Purcell," Stan said.

"And I happen to be a very busy man."

"If you listened to the radio, maybe you heard about the Minotaur—"

"Oh, for crying out loud, Purcell. Don't start thinking every madman you hear about is a creature from the past."

"But I saw him with my own eyes, Dr. Hatton. Last night at the museum."

"What did you say?"

"I mean, I—well—" Stan wished he could yank his foot out of his mouth, but knew it was too late.

"Listen to me, Purcell. I don't know what you're up to, but if you were at the museum last night I have a good mind to turn you over to the police."

"I can explain everything," Stan said for the second time

this morning and knew for the second time he could not.

"Someone was at the museum last night, all right. Someone broke a valuable Minoan II vase. Someone shattered a show case in the Mineralogy Room. The head watchman couldn't catch him. And then, if this doesn't top everything, he came back later, forcing his way in somehow, and stealing a genuine Cretan double-ax from the Minoan Room. By God, Purcell, if it was you I'll see to it the police throw the book at you."

"I didn't steal anything," Stan said lamely, wondering if that would satisfy Hatton.

"You'll hear more about this, Purcell."

Stan was afraid he would. "Did you say a Cretan double-ax was stolen?"

"You're damned right that's what I said. Purcell, I'm going to want you down here for the police investigation. If you don't promise to come of your own free will, I can get the police to issue a warrant."

"I'll be there," Stan promised. Thinking of the stolen double-ax and the Minotaur on the loose, he would like nothing better than to be among the police.

"Is that another kind of radio?" Teusa asked, pointing

at the telephone after Stan had hung up.

"I was talking to the director of the museum," Stan explained. "We're going right over there."

"If you say so. But I thought we're in some kind of trouble over there."

"We'll be in worse trouble if the Minotaur succeeds in finding us."

"I'm not afraid as long as you're here."

Just then Stan heard a scream come floating, disembodied, up the stairwell in the hall outside. A moment later there was the pounding of feet on the landing, followed by a loud shattering sound at the door. The door shook and something sharp and gleaming appeared for an instant through a crack in the wood, then was withdrawn.

"Help!" someone screamed. Stan recognized Mrs. Peabody's voice.

The door shook again, then collapsed as if it were made not of wood but of cardboard, with a great gash in its middle and hanging into the apartment dangling from one hinge.

Wearing his bull mask and brandishing a three-foot-long Cretan double-ax either blade of which could decapitate an elephant, the Minotaur

charged, uttering a fearsome battle cry, into the apartment.

"Go get him, Stan!" Teusa shouted gleefully. So saying, she scampered across the room out of Stan's way. Stan clutched wildly at a kitchen chair and lifted it overhead just as the Minotaur reached him, swinging the double-ax with both hands like a baseball bat.

Stan met the downward swing of the ax with his chair, and watched the four legs sliced neatly from it as if they had been held there with Scotch tape. The Minotaur swung completely around and sent the double-ax blade whistling at Stan's head again.

What was left of the chair met it and flew from Stan's hands as the ax continued in its downward arc, deflected a few inches by the chair so that it missed Stan, the blade burying itself four inches in the hard oak flooring of the apartment.

The Minotaur braced both feet, one on either side of his weapon, and tugged. Watching him warily, Stan lifted the second kitchen chair and held it ready. Finally, with a mighty tug, the Minotaur pulled his double-ax free of the floor, but Minotaur and ax went hurtling across the room,

the former striking the far wall with a bone-jarring thud and the latter clattering across the floor and under the sink in the kitchenette.

Stan took three running strides into the kitchenette and dove under the sink, where the Minotaur soon joined him and grappled with him there for possession of the double-ax. While the Minotaur's thumbs explored Stan's face, attempting to gouge out his eyes, Stan yanked at the two great horns on the bull mask and forced the Minotaur's head back. The Minotaur howled in outraged protest and Stan was all set to congratulate himself when the mask came off in his hands, the Minotaur broke free of him, got hold of the double-ax, stood up and swung the weapon in a wild swipe.

Ducking his head, Stan heard the blade of the double-ax clang against one of the pipes under the sink. Seconds later, Stan was doused by a powerful jet of water from the ruptured pipe.

"We had better plumbing than this back in Crete," the Minotaur said, and swung his double-ax again, shattering the enamel of the sink as he narrowly missed Stan's head. Stan got in under the Cretan's lunge and was wrestling with

him and shouting to Teusa to keep out of the way and hoping the Minotaur would lack sufficient leverage to swing his weapon again.

As he forced the Minotaur back across the room, Stan was dimly aware of shouts in the hallway, of Mrs. Peabody's anxious voice, other voices. A stout policeman whose face was red from climbing the three flights of stairs to the apartment stood in the doorway, mopping his brow and looking incredulously at what he saw inside.

The Minotaur saw him, must have recognized the uniform as signifying law since his brush the night before with the men in blue. Breaking loose from Stan, he swung the double-ax in a graceful, almost easy arc. The side of the blade caught the policeman on the side of his face and the policeman went down, his drawn pistol banging on the floor. Then Stan closed with the Minotaur again and heard Mrs. Peabody yelling some more.

"O.K.!" Teusa yelled abruptly. "If you don't drop that ax, I'll kill you." She must have recognized the policeman's gun for a weapon. She was clutching it in both hands and pointing the butt of the

.38 revolver at the Minotaur. The gaping hole of the barrel was pointed squarely at her own chest and one of her fingers was tightening on the trigger.

"No!" Stan roared. "Teusa, look out. You'll kill yourself. Teusa!"

But Teusa ignored him and told the Minotaur, "I'm going to count three."

While fighting with the Minotaur, when death hovered just over his head in the form of the bronze blade of the double-ax, Stan hadn't feared for his safety. He had fought unthinkingly, violently—and, he realized, with considerable and surprising success. But now it was different. Now Teusa's life was in danger because she was trying to help him.

The Minotaur bellowed a fierce Cretan oath and came at Stan once more. Stan responded with a loud echoing cheer from his college days, stepped inside the swing of the double-ax as Teusa said, "One," and smote the Minotaur across the bridge of his nose with his right fist.

The Minotaur staggered back, still clutching his double-ax. "Two," said Teusa, still pointing the revolver at her own breast and apparently in earnest about using it

although completely ignorant of what the results would be.

Stan buried his left fist in the bare flesh of the Minotaur's bare midsection and heard the Cretan expell all the air from his lungs. Then Stan crossed his right fist to the Minotaur's jaw before Teusa could say "three" and the Minotaur stumbled to his knees and pitched forward on his face.

"Baby!" Stan cried, turning to Teusa. He was hardly aware of Mrs. Peabody rushing into the room tearfully and examining her ruined door. He took Teusa in his arms and kissed her and said, "You were trying to help me, but you would have killed yourself. Baby, baby . . ."

And their kisses, Cretan and American, bridge the gap of three thousand years and they might have stood that way, kissing forever, if the Minotaur had not climbed groggily to his feet. Stan let go of Teusa and took the revolver from her hand, facing the Minotaur with it.

"That's all right," the Minotaur said, sulking, "I know when I'm licked. If a man can't fight whenever he wants to and can't go around wearing whatever clothing he wants, this place isn't for me. I won't give you any trouble."

"And you'll leave me alone?" Teusa asked him.

"If you're crazy enough to stay here in this fantastic century, I'll leave you alone."

Teusa hugged Stan and then they were talking with the Minotaur about what could be done while Mrs. Peabody was trying to revive the unconscious policeman. Finally, Stan gave the Minotaur a suit of his clothing and, while the Minotaur got dressed, Stan put the bull's head mask and the double-ax in a valise. Then, with the Minotaur and Teusa, Stan set out for the museum, first promising to pay Mrs. Peabody for the broken door if she insisted to the policeman that he had been seeing things and must have stumbled against the doorjamb and thus knocked himself unconscious.

Sam Sawyer was guarding the Minoan Room of the museum when Stan, Teusa and the Minotaur reached it.

"Hi, Sam," Stan said.

"No one can go in there. There's going to be an investigation in about an hour."

Stan took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and gave it to the watchman. "We're going in," he said, "if it's all right with you."

"It's not all right with me."

(Concluded on page 117)



WITH this issue, *Amazing Stories* starts a new department in which we hope to bring you news and reviews of the latest books in the field—science fiction novels and anthologies, fantasies, and books on such scientific subjects as space flight, space medicine, cybernetics, robotics, parapsychology, and the like. The critic must apply himself to his task with a typically split mind: to review on the basis of what he, as a professional reader, likes and respects; and on the other hand, to examine his criticism in the light of the author's intent, and the audience's taste. Herewith, then, our first department:

SHADOWS IN THE SUN. *By Chad Oliver. 152 pp. Ballantine Books. 35¢ paper; \$2.00 hard cover.*

Mr. Oliver, a respected s-f writer, has here written a tale of an anthropologist who investigates a small Texas town, and discovers it to be filled with Galactics who are using Earth (as they do all Earth-type planets as *lebensraum*. The 6,000 inhabitants are humanoid, but non-human.

What can Paul Ellery do? No military invasion is planned—merely a slow seepage from outer space. Were he to broadcast his discovery, Paul would wind up in a mental institution. What he does do about it and how he makes peace with his conscience as well as his girl is the theme of a book which, while well-written, goes nowhere. This novel needed a rousing menace—an element of danger which would have given suspense and importance to the story. Without it, "Shadows In the Sun" becomes a failure.

All thirteen stories in this excellent collection are good; a couple are superb. *Amazing* is represented by two: "The Collectors", in which G. Gordon Dewey and Max Dancey tell of an incident which might happen to any of us in the subway, but which, fortunately, doesn't; while, in "The Last Day", Richard Matheson writes so vividly of Earth's end and its impact on a family as to leave a powerful and lasting impression. Jack Vance's "D.P." is a tale of the day millions of troglodytes crawled up out of the center of the Earth, and what happened to them—an ironic, beautifully underwritten novelet of Man's inhumanity to Man-kind. Alfred Bester, that walking atomic pile, furnishes another brilliant *tour-de-force* in "Time Is the Traitor"; Fritz Leiber, who wrote the anthology's Introduction, smashes out a three-bagger with "The Big Holiday", and one of his best stories, "A Bad Day For Sales."

On the up-beat side are William Morrison's chucklesome vignette, "Model of a Judge", and Ruth M. Goldsmith's "Yankee Exodus", in which a newcomer to science fiction plants both shapely feet firmly on your funnybone. Other writers represented are Joseph Shallit with "Wonder Child"; J. T. McIntosh with "One In Three Hundred"; Walter M. Miller with "Crucifixus Etiam"; Ward Moore with "Lot"; and Mark Clifton and Alex Apostolides with "What Thin Partitions." A *must* for any collector, and certainly to be recommended to all who appreciate good examples of science fiction short stories.

SATELLITE E ONE. By Jeffery Lloyd Castle. 223 pp. Dodd, Mead, & Co. \$3.00

In the hands of an adept, even a cliché may turn out to be a surprise. At first thought, what could be more boring to the s-f aficionado than another narrative of the building of the first Space Station? You're in for a surprise. Mr. Castle has written a story which is so fresh, so surprising, so full of human interest as to make this book a discovery. The secret of his success is to be found in his handling of character: we know each person so well that we can identify with him. There

are no heroes and no villains in the tale—there are only human beings. When, added to this grasp of characterization, a writer demonstrates literacy, an imposing and genuine grasp of science, and the ability to transmit fictional clarity and excitement, we welcome him with open arms, proclaiming this book a worthy contender for the title of the best science fiction novel of the year.

CONAN THE BARBARIAN. *By Robert E. Howard. 224 pp. Gnome Press. \$3.00*

I have always had a weak spot in my heart for Conan, that giant barbarian who lived in the prehistoric age invented by his creator, the late Robert E. Howard. This, the fifth in the series of books which chronicle the adventures of Conan, may well be the best. Mr. Howard's style, of the "thud-and-blunder" school, is saved by one grace: he believed in his creation with such force and fury that some of it seeped out of his tortured heart, and into his ink. The chapter titles tell their own story: "Black Colossus," "Shadows In the Moonlight", "A Witch Shall Be Born", "Shadows In Zamboula", and "The Devil In Iron." Each is a separate adventure, and each should re-awaken those joyous ferocities we knew as adolescents, when, in fantasy, we allowed our burgeoning aggressions free and ecstatic play. With all their faults, the tales of Conan move you still.

DESIGN OF THE UNIVERSE. *By Fritz Kahn. 373 pp. Crown Publishers. \$5.00*

The cautious critic carps carefully, lest he get the reputation of being too easily pleased. I don't care. This book calls for every superlative in Roget's listing under "wonderful." Here, between two covers, are a college education in science, a fund of fascinating stories about the men who have made our world, and an explanation of the natural laws which govern the universe—all written with unrivalled sanity, lucidity, simplicity, and clarity. Here are the latest theories concerning those microcosmic worlds, the atoms; the latest discoveries about the giant worlds of the macrocosmos which swim above our heads. For the writer of science fiction, here

are facts which can lead to that peculiar rationale which ultimately emerges as a story idea. For the layman, here is a painless, fascinating education in physics, chemistry, astronomy, geology—indeed, in the whole body of science. There are few teachers whose innate simplicity (paradoxically, the result of great complexity) can match Dr. Kahn's: his writing has the limpid lucidity of a great gem. As a reference source, "Design of the Universe" is unrivalled. As a book to while away the time, it offers more excitement than most science fiction novels. Now that I've read it, I'm thinking of getting Dr. Kahn's first book, "Man In Structure and Function." Anyone who can write nonfiction as he does is a pleasure to have around. Whether layman or scientist, science fiction reader or writer, this is the book for you.

THE END

THE SIREN FROM CNOSSUS

(Concluded from page 113)

But Sam Sawyer winked. "A feller can turn his back."

Inside the Minoan Room, Sam opened his suitcase, took out the double-ax and placed it back on its wall prongs. Then Stan was busy kissing Teusa again and assuring her he loved her while the Minotaur slipped out of Stan's suit and put it in the valise.

"You're sure?" Stan asked.

"Yes," said the Minotaur, and shook hands with Stan, gave Teusa a quick kiss on her cheek, and stepped inside the picture frame, where Stan adjusted the bull's head mask.

"How does it work?"

"Press the button on the side," said the Minotaur. "And hurry up. I've had enough of this crazy place. If I slept a frozen sleep three thousand years I guess I can sleep three

thousand more years. Maybe then, when I wake up, the people in that age will appreciate a devoté of the bull god."

"I hope so," Stan said devoutly, pressing the button.

Seconds later, the Minotaur looked like a photograph.

There would be a lot to explain, of course. There was the matter of the broken Minoan vase and the shattered show case in the Mineralogy Room, and the beautiful girl missing from the photograph.

But Stan thought Hatton would be satisfied with the picture of the Minotaur. Stan would get his job back, he knew, and if the picture was minus its beautiful Cretan girl, Stan would know where to lay his hands on her.

Which was an excellent idea!

THE END



BY THE READERS

Dear H.B.

I see you are being fooled by what statisticians might call a biased sample. Does the fact that 324 *letter writers* want a letter section, while only 51 *letter writers* don't want one, mean that the *readers* are six to one in favor of a letter section? I, for one, buy science-fiction magazines to read fiction. If I wanted to read letters I would buy "Pen Pals."

Come on, *readers*, write a postcard in favor of fiction, or the letter writers will take over the whole magazine by default.

Cloyd Woolley, Jr.

c/o Otto Long, Bellport, New York

● *Your call to the colors, Cloyd, seems a little premature. We sit here and read the mail and hope for the best. So many pages will be set aside for the letter writers, so many for the fanzines, so many for book reviews. But put them all together and they spell about ten percent of the entire contents, yet these are features more than that percentage of our readers have asked for. The quality of stories and illustrations will more than make up for the "lost" pages.—ED.*

Dear Sirs:

I read both *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. I enjoy every story in both issues.

Let's have longer novels. Why don't you start a new magazine and publish the novels and short novels that appeared in

Amazing and *Fantastic* back in the early years of them. I know that many of us new readers would like it for we missed all of them.

Gordon Johnson
Rt. 5, Box 170, El Dorado, Ark.

● *It's tough enough these days to sell new material, let alone reprint magazines. By using the old novels, a publisher automatically eliminates all readers who read them originally. There are still plenty of good stories being written these days; we'll bring them to you every issue.*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

In response to your little note at the bottom of page 128, I'm writing in to congratulate you on your decision to switch back to the "old-style" *Amazing*. I'm pretty sure that once you complete the change, *Amazing* will return to its former respect.

You've printed some pretty sorry material since going into slick format, so maybe now we can settle back into getting some good reading done.

I'd like to congratulate you and the artists for the cover (March) and the illos on page 6-7 and 77. The others seemed to be "lifeless." More by Beecham.

Haven't read the stories yet, but if they are as good as the illustrations and blurbs promise, I'll enjoy them no end.

Again, congratulations on a wise choice of action.

Sam Johnson
(No address given)

● *Actually, Sam, we're not going back to the "old-style" Amazing. We simply intend to restore some of the good features from the pre-digest days: "tighter" illustrations, more action stories, and the features that reader demand say should never have been dropped. The next few months should tell us how successful the experiment has been.*—ED.

Dear Ed.

I have three favors to ask of you and all three have to do with getting this letter published.

First and foremost is getting a collection of saucer reports.

... OR SO YOU SAY

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I want any and all persons who have seen or heard of anyone who has seen or heard of a flying saucer to write me a letter. In that letter I want *all* the facts, including time, location, description, weather conditions, and any other information they care to include. I also want clippings from newspapers and magazines; please include name of newspaper, magazine, etc.

Second, I have a collection of magazines (not complete) that I would like to sell or swap; write me stating what you want.

Third, I wish to contact fans interested in magnetic power. What the hell is this MP? I don't know; I became interested in it when I read an article in a magazine stating that MP was the power behind the flying saucers.

Congrats to you on a very fine magazine, the most complete I have ever read.

Jerry F. Viles
Route 1, Heiskell, Tenn.

● *Ain't you heard, Jerry? They ain't no flying saucers. Everybody'll tell you that—except the people who've seen them!—ED.*

Dear Sirs:

I love astronomy a lot and I think *Amazing* is the best I have read in a long time. I think the editor and the art editor have done a good job.

The Readers' Section will be a good column to learn how other people feel about the book.

Michael Levine
3561 Cedarbrook, Cleveland, Ohio

● *Thanks for your interest, Mike. The younger reader of science-fiction has done much by his support to make Amazing the leader in the field. Your letters are always welcome.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

By this letter I want to go on record as voting for a Readers' Letter Section. And frankly I don't know why. I've only written one letter to a magazine in my life. That was to *Amazing* several years ago before it went through the CHANGE.

In fact that was the subject discussed. At that time ole A. S. was being left far behind. If my memory serves me correctly you had just gotten into the saddle.

Well, thanks, Mr. Browne, for bringing the magazine out of the tall corn. I am beginning to line my copies up on one of my den shelves instead of in the attic. It is accompanied by only two other magazines.

The only way I know to prove my delight with *Amazing* under your guidance is to enclose a check for a two-year subscription. You will find it herewith. All this is from a reader who gave up his weekly allowance and a Saturday double feature of Tom Mix and a Joe Bonomo serial to buy the first copy of *Amazing Stories* that hit the newsstand in a little Georgia town long years ago . . . and never regretted it.

By the way, sir, on the last page of a certain book I have before me is printed:

*What befell Tharn during his search for the girl
he loved will be told in the second book of Tharn.

I have waited ten years for this book. Is it coming? I'm really serious.

I'm also glad to see the more or less short-short stories in the magazine. . . . Seriously, Mr. Browne, thanks for a fine magazine. Just make it monthly.

J. G. David

Box 205, Bishopville, S. C.

● *Your subscription is appreciated, J. G. and has been put through. . . . The sequel to Warrior of the Dawn appeared as a serial in Amazing Stories during the later part of 1948. While we have no back issues containing the story, any one of the readers who collect back issues will be able to help you.—ED.*

Mr. Browne:

The artwork in the March issue of *Amazing* was a great improvement over past issues. I especially liked the interior work by Finlay. As for the cover, it certainly had sharp colors that would attract attention. I liked it.

Now to the stories: "You Could Be Wrong," was the best. I say this because it was different . . . what an ending! Lesser's "The Rusted Jungle" rates second. Having a culture based on a science-fiction magazine made it even more interesting. "The

Psionic Mousetrap" fell flat because of bad writing or something. Although the plot was good I didn't care for it. "Dissatisfaction Guaranteed" may have been silly but I enjoyed it nonetheless.

Being a new reader of your magazine I have seen only a few issues of the old *Amazing* with features and departments. Yet I believe you made a mistake in dropping them when you changed to digest size. Now that you're going to return them *Amazing* will have more personality, life, and the spark that stories alone just can't give a magazine. The problem is will it give *Amazing* more readers. Only time will tell.

I would like to correspond with any reader who cares to write.

Dan Adkins

General Delivery, East Liverpool, Ohio

● *"Personality, life, and the spark" are what we're after, Dan. If those qualities are important to our readership, it won't take long to find out. But we're not going to lose sight of the fact that the story is the thing.—ED.*

Gentlemen:

That any editor or author in our times should be unacquainted with the scriptures and the classics is inconceivable and as everyone knows these aforesaid sources are founded on the principles of the fasting as well as for the development of intelligence, endurance and life, even to the point of eternally continuing physical life, perpetually growing stronger while constantly making longer fasts necessary in order to prevent the physical dissolution which otherwise would be the unavoidable case. If our entire modern culture is resting on the base of knowledge supplied by these aforesaid thinkers, how can it be then that "Democracy and nutrition" could have come to be the base from which our recalled "sciences" go out in their researches. Since anything so obvious as the one falling for appetites should starve when he does not consume foods, it ought to be equally clear that the one not falling for appetites and who is holding food on principle in contempt does not trouble his nervous system, with the result that there is no digestion, accordingly no need for replacement and subsequently no need of nutrition and

consumption of so-called "foods" as long as he neither destroys his body or dissolves the foods entered in his body when appetites do not exist in the temptations for his pleasure.

Allow this to be said to your authors, so shall these same authors produce a new type of literature making over the total theories upon which we have for the past 200 years desperately attempted to function a word in numberless teachings of different types of contradictions.

The proof that this is so is already known to all men of education in the world today, so more need not be said. Except that they may look at the differences in the translations of the scriptures to get a better idea of the counterfeiting of the translations of the sciences of old.

G. F. Weidenhall

Royalhuset, Koping, Sweden

● *So watch it, see?*—ED.

Dear Editor:

Here is a letter with no gripes, so it will probably be a little dull. However, I like the new format, the covers, the stories, and the letters with your straightforward comments.

It would be wonderful to have a magazine with covers by Bonestell (or equivalent, profuse illustrations in color), and with the pick of the world's best science fiction. But stf readers realize that we are too few in number to support such a dream, and that an editor must do the best he can. As for me, I read *all* the stf magazines and feel I get my money's worth, though some stories and even whole issues are pretty weak.

I like the Letters Department, especially when they show a few differences of opinion. It shows the readers are thinking, though their conclusions differ.

For instance, I don't believe we will ever have any off-the-earth travel as long as we have to depend upon rockets with chemical fuel. I think the best attainable exhaust velocities would still be so slow as to make it necessary to carry so much weight that we couldn't even make a round trip to the moon. It looks like such voyaging is going to wait until some control of gravity is found. Impossible? Well, do you suppose Michael Faraday could have foreseen radar?

Anyway, keep at it as long and as well as you can. I like *Amazing* and I'll buy it as long as you print it.

F. W. Zwicky
2244 So. 6th St., Rockford, Ill.

● *We had the magazine—two of 'em, in fact—you describe in your second paragraph. They sold well, too—but not well enough to continue publishing them. So we dropped the color and the book-type paper as unnecessary fripperies, and concentrated on bringing our readers strong stories and illustrations. . . . Differences of opinion are what make a Letters Department worth the pages used. You can't very well say, "Okay, readers, start fighting at the count of three!" Eventually one reader gets sore, in print, at what another reader says—and the fight is on, with practically everybody taking sides. That's when the department takes on character.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I'm very happy that *Amazing* is putting back the departments, and I think the letter section is a fine start. I'm looking forward to the book- and fanzine-review departments.

The March cover of *Amazing* is very good, and the interior illustrations are wonderful. They really have taken a change for the better.

This is how I rate the stories in the March issue: 1. "The Rusted Jungle" by Milton Lesser. A truly great story by a wonderful author. It could use a sequel. 2. "Two to the Stars" by Ivar Jorgensen. Another great story by one of my favorite sf authors. It also could use a sequel. 3. "You Could be Wrong" by Robert Bloch. One of Bloch's best. 4 "The Psionic Mousetrap" by Murray Leinster. A good story but the ending was a little difficult. 5. "Dissatisfaction Guaranteed" by John Toland. A good humorous story.

As for Mr. Farbles, I think he should be satisfied when he sees the lineup for the March issue. I agree with Mr. Dietz about a Readers Department, and about long stories. I'd rather read two long stories than five shorts.

I agree with you too, ed. *Amazing* and *Fantastic* covers have improved. The December cover on *Fantastic* and the January cover on *Amazing* were two of the best I've ever seen.

And how about some stories by you, Mr. B.? Your story "Twelve Times Zero" in the first issue of IF was wonderful!

Harvey Schweitzer
(Address not given)

● *Your rating of the stories in the March issue, Harvey, was representative of the majority, which is why we've used it. Glad you liked the last few covers—but they're going to look pretty pale compared with those we've got coming up. . . . Your editor is doing most of his writing these days over in the (ugh!) detective and suspense fields.—ED.*

Dear Howard Browne:

You will no doubt remember [You bet we do!—Ed.] under what different conditions was the last time—quite a few years back—when we came via mail in contact with one another. As I can hardly remember what the cause of our somewhat animated discussion of that period was, it is just as well that it stays buried. Though, come to think of it, I believe that at that time I waxed heatedly over various transfigurations that the old *Fantastic* and *Amazing* underwent, both in format and contents. Such things as the shrinkage of size to pocketbook or digest dimensions and the increase of price at the same time used to do everything close to infuriating me . . . especially when comparisons of most war-time and post-war issues of *Fantastic* and *Amazing* must be made in contrast to the recent format of the last two or three years. But such things scarcely perplex me any more. I've but to glance about me at the overall deterioration of most of the SF "field" to realize that most every publisher/editor is in the same boat. . . .

In view of what most SF publishing efforts of today are, the uncalled for debasement of the once "lowly" pulp format—and its contents—now makes it seem quite a bit the other way around. The question is: if we had to go back hardly more than ten years with the same type of format that *Amazing* and *Fantastic* are now in, placing them both side by side with the *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* of that period, would you give the "new-look" *Amazing* and *Fantastic* even six months to survive even if they sold for 20¢ a copy? Or better still, if it had to sell at 35¢ and still be competing

with the 25¢ 190 or 210 pages, and the typical format offered by *Amazing* then, would it even last one issue?

I'm afraid I've put together a more complicated group of sentences than is permissible. So I'll just say it tersely and bluntly over again: I do not think that if the present 1955 format of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* had to sell in competition with the 1945-46 pulp format, they'd survive more than one issue even at 10¢ less per copy. I just bring this up in order to clarify a point which I think should be well thought over and taken.

If there were a resurgence of the "old type" of SF mags we once knew and liked so much, it would help a lot to restore life in a declining and gradually atrophying market. This means a lot of publishers, aside from your own, might be wise in abandoning the so-called dignified "digest" format, which they thought would be a financial Godsend, but which in reality turned out to be a bigger bust than the pulps ever were. Oh, there's no denying that a mag like the kind of *Fantastic* you had with the first three or four issues won't sell well. However, when such a mag gradually turns into nothing more than a poor replica of its former 25¢ pulp format (*and costs 10¢ more per copy . . . and gives approximately 40% less reading matter*), it becomes naught but an object of pity.

The truth is that I have in my files SF-mystery-fantasy mags that sold for 10¢ or 15¢, published in the early 40's, which would put to shame most of those selling for 35¢ today. But I don't mean so much the price—rather, it's the contents, their quality and variety. Especially when taken into consideration that juveniles, escapists and such constitute the majority of SF readers. Therefore, the return of letters, fanzine columns, reviews, etc., already solves a good part of the problem. No, the answer to all of it isn't to include a pair of 3-D glasses with each issue; nor is it selling Captain Video beany caps, or buttons, or memberships in the Ivar Jorgensen SF fan club. The answer to it all isn't too hard at all, and as Sgt. Joe Friday would say, "You figure it out."

In reviving the Letters Department as you're now doing, the best way of not making others regret it's back again is by keeping the letters of controversial, stimulating, even radical mode, so long as they don't get out of hand with crackpot or

"mystery" discussions. And, of course, letters sure of anaesthetizing readers into quick boredom are those which "rate" the magazine from cover to cover, i.e., "This ish had a bad cover. The stories I liked best are in the following order with my reasons for selecting same. . . ." Kept to 100 to 150 words, such letters may not be entirely objectionable, however. Meanwhile, I find that while a letter, like that of Mr. Spalding's in the March number, may be welcome, being that it pertains to the realm of current findings and provable research, beware nonetheless! It's those which are prone to follow from various cultists or others having an axe to grind that often get out of hand, especially when they verge between unaccepted or disapproved theories or the babblings of some sect at the foot of Mt. Shasta.

But for those who feel that religious, social, political, and various world problems can be solved or analyzed vicariously through a SF mag's letter section (as too often seems to be the case), a few day or night extension courses—either for credit or under an "adult attendance" program—would be far more beneficial to say the least. Numerous—I should say practically all—colleges offer such a service. It's highly regrettable, though, that all too many prefer groping for learning usually along a harder, tougher course than taking the more approved, easier ways.

Calvin Thomas Beck
20 Woodcliff Ave., Hudson Heights, N. J.

● *You don't go forward by going back, Senor Beck. The change from pulp format to digest came about when readers showed a preference for the less bulky type of magazine and book. Money buys less today; the 35¢ of 1955 is less in value than the two-bits of 1946. Stories are what the authors send to the editor, the latter takes the best he can get for the price he pays. No editor turns down the best story submitted and takes the second best. Newsdealers literally hide the few old-style pulps being distributed today. If we, and other publishers, thought a return to the old format would raise percentage of sales—back it would come! . . . We intend to use all types of letters which our readers take the trouble to write. Controversial missives—and missiles—are doubly welcome.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

It is a distinct pleasure to announce that preliminary arrangements have been completed for one of science-fiction's major events of 1955: The First Annual Southeastern Science Fiction Conference. This affair, the first in the South in many years, will be held April 2nd and 3rd at the Dinkler Plaza Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia.

All Southern readers are invited to attend, as well as those from the Northern cities, as Cleveland, New York and Cincinnati are planning to attend. . . . At this time it is too early to announce just who will be there, but many prominent writers are expected. It *can* be stated that Wilson Tucker will be master of ceremonies at the banquet.

The cost of the entire affair (including normal expenses) will be a \$1.00 registration fee which should be sent to Ian Macauley, 57 East Park Lane, Atlanta 5, Ga. This \$1.00 will entitle you to all the pre-convention publicity notices and will help defray preliminary expenses.

Robert A. Madle
Publicity Chairman
1620 Anderson St., Charlotte, N. C.

● *Hope the Convention is a smashing success, Bob.*—ED.

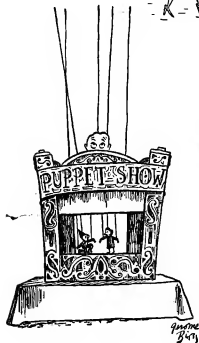
Dear Howard:

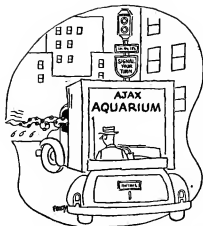
Fifth Anniversary Fanvet Convention, Sunday, April 17, 1955, at Werdermann's Hall, 3rd Avenue at East 16th Street, New York, N. Y. Most New York science/fantasy editors, authors, artists, and readers will attend. Program starts at 1:00 P.M., doors open at 12:00 noon. Speakers will be editors, writers, artists. Feature of the day: a super GIANT auction, which will include original covers and inside illustrations, books and magazines and rare collector's items. All profits will go to the Fantasy Veterans Association to be used to mail science-fantasy magazines to readers in the U.S. Armed Forces overseas, and to establish a science-fantasy library in all Veterans Hospitals in the United States.

James V. Taurasi
137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y.

● *This, we'd say, is a must for everyone in the New York area. We hope to see all of you there.*—ED.

IT TAKES ALL KINDS . . .





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A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS, by Edgar Pangborn — Angelo Pontefecchino can destroy the earth... or he can save it. But it's not up to him to decide! The MARTIANS have him in their power — and THEY decide!

THE CAVES OF STEEL, by Isaac Asimov — Robots are the most hated creatures on earth. Then a noted robot scientist is murdered. Detective Baley has to track down the killer. And — he's given a robot as a partner!

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- | | |
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